

WISE FOLLY IN THE BRITISH REALIST NOVEL

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This dissertation proposes that British novelistic realism of the nineteenth century is not an authoritative form designed to represent a fixed reality and elicit readers' assent to it. Instead, realist novelists, including Walter Scott, George Meredith, George Eliot, and Rudyard Kipling, use formal practices I call "wise folly" to perform an ambivalent authority that invites disagreement. With a history that can be traced through such earlier sources as Plato's dialogues, Erasmus's writings, and Shakespeare's fools, wise folly unfixes standards of wisdom and folly in a work and complicates ethical judgments. Through close readings of forms of wise folly in realist novels, this dissertation revises conventional conceptions of the realist narrator as a rhetorically coercive voice and realism as a pretense to omniscience, proposing instead that realist novels, as formed objects apprehended by readers, are a means for negotiating diverse views of reality.

The introductory chapter, "Wise Folly and Narrative Discourse," outlines the concept of wise folly and, through readings of *Tristram Shandy* and *Vanity Fair*, explains its role in the emergence of a specifically realist narrative discourse. The second chapter, "Narrative Authority and George Meredith's Gnomes," examines gnomic utterances such as aphorisms, maxims, and epigrams in Meredith's work, arguing that Meredith uses these utterances to construct an ambivalent narrative authority. The third chapter, "George Eliot's Pharmacy," explains the

function of scapegoat figures who occupy the margins of Eliot's novels and who, from those margins, trace the limitations of the dominant ethics in the novels. The fourth chapter, "Learning We Are Fools," addresses the desultory status of literary quotation and allusion in the novels of Scott and Meredith, where the literary can be a source of folly and where education is an inherently intertextual process, fraught with error, through which one acquires means to understand the world. The fifth chapter, "If: Aesthetics and Ideology Revisited," situates play in Kipling's *Kim* within the context of wise folly and aesthetic theory, and describes Kipling's canny treatment of knowledge in *Kim*, which employs Orientalist and other modes of knowing even as it imagines the impossibility of sure knowledge.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Matthew Fellion is an Assistant Professor of English at St. Francis Xavier University. He completed his B.A. in 2007 as an English specialist at the University of Toronto at Scarborough, where he received a Governor General's Silver Academic Medal. He obtained his M.A. and his Ph.D. from Cornell University in 2010 and 2012.

For Cathy, Dave, and Nick Fellion, with love

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I am grateful to my family for their unflagging support. This work is dedicated to them. I thank my mother for worrying about me even when I protest, my father for showing me what it means to be a great teacher, and my brother for inspiring me always to reflect on the value of what I do. Finally, I am forever grateful to Katherine Alia Inglis for reading this project with a sympathy that George Eliot would have envied and for buoying me through the last four years with good humour and love. In his *Essay on Comedy* George Meredith attributes to Shakespeare and Cervantes a “laughter of the mind and heart conjoined.” I first heard Katherine’s when I recounted to her Adrian Harley’s Procession of the Cake from *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Her laughter sustains me daily, and I hope this dissertation shares some of its spirit.

A version of Chapter Five is forthcoming in 2013 in *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*; the material appears here with permission. The anonymous reader helped immensely to focus the argument and improve the style.

What wisdom there may be in the following pages I owe to many voices. The folly is all mine.

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Chapter One

Wise Folly and Narrative Discourse

Fool, *n.* A person who pervades the domain of intellectual speculation and diffuses himself through the channels of moral activity. He is omnific, omniform, omnipercipient, omniscient, omnipotent. He it was who invented letters, printing, the railroad, the steamboat, the telegraph, the platitude, and the circle of the sciences. He created patriotism and taught the nations war—founded theology, philosophy, law, medicine, and Chicago. He established monarchical and republican government. He is from everlasting to everlasting—such as creation's dawn beheld he fooleth now. In the morning of time he sang upon primitive hills, and in the noonday of existence headed the procession of being. His grandmotherly hand has warmly tucked-in the set sun of civilization, and in the twilight he prepares Man's evening meal of milk and morality and turns down the covers of the universal grave. And after the rest of us shall have retired for the night of eternal oblivion he will sit up to write a history of human civilization. (Bierce, "Fool")

I will not be arguing in this dissertation that folly pervades and presides over everything constitutively human, and that the closest achievable approximation of wisdom is the recognition of human folly, including one's own. This idea loses much of its purpose when one simply asserts it. When one performs it, however, wears it as a mask, dramatizes it in fiction, or weaves

it into a dialogue of different ideas, spoken by different voices, the idea can catalyze inquiry into the constitution of wisdom. Socratic irony is an example of this process, conditioned by the historical and discursive context of Plato's writing and the particular concerns of his dialogues, but it is only one example, and though Plato's practices predate the others that will be examined here, they belong to a larger pattern that I call, descriptively, "wise folly." The terms "wisdom" and "folly" are useful because they are amenable to contextual definition. I deploy them in the abstract with deliberate looseness: "wisdom" names some conjunction of right thought and action, and is associated with terms that are conventionally valued positively and sought after by normative ethical philosophy, such as knowledge, intelligence, virtue, and the good; "folly" is antithetical to wisdom, associated with ignorance, stupidity, vice, and error. These terms define an axis onto which the specific values pursued in literary works will be mapped, while also permitting me to trace diachronic, intertextual continuities between these works' configurations of ethical categories. While wisdom in George Meredith's novels differs from wisdom in George Eliot's, Walter Scott's, or Rudyard Kipling's, these authors all toy with and complicate fundamental ethical oppositions without annihilating them, inviting readers' dissent from values and philosophical claims apparently endorsed by their novels. Wise folly raises the possibility that, precisely because the narrator pretends to be a novel's primary source of wisdom, the narrator is liable to misjudge the world of the novel and its characters. Wise folly realizes this world by making it an object of debate, liberating it from the ostensibly definitive claims of the narrative discourse.

Ambrose Bierce's definition of "Fool" in *The Devil's Dictionary*, by personifying human folly as a demiurge, captures the universalizing gesture of wise folly. His definition of "Folly," which begins "That 'gift and faculty divine' whose creative and controlling energy inspires

Man's mind, guides his actions and adorns his life," also personifies the concept by concluding with a sonnet apostrophizing "All-Father Folly." "Wise folly" alludes to the figure of the wise fool, and because it names the performance of an idea rather than the idea itself, the folly is often accompanied by a fool who carries out the performance—Socrates, Chaucer's Geoffrey, Erasmus's goddess Folly, Shakespeare's clowns, Tristram Shandy. I choose these extremely canonical examples because they are readily available, not only to scholars and students of literature, but also to the authors who practise wise folly in the British realist novel, though I hope by the end of this study to have elaborated a concept widely adaptable to describing works in various literary traditions. Criticism has often dealt with wise fools where they appear: William Empson's "The Praise of Folly" and "Fool in *Lear*" in *The Structure of Complex Words* unpack "fool" as a complex word in Erasmus and Shakespeare; and Jonathan Bate's "Shakespeare's Foolosophy" considers how Lear's Fool might convey an alternative philosophy or an alternative *to* philosophy. Notable extended histories and typologies of the fool in its own right include Enid Welsford's *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, Sandra Billington's *A Social History of the Fool*, and William Willeford's *The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience*. More recently, Beatrice K. Otto has explored the figure in *Fools Are Everywhere*, taking a pragmatic view of its universality: "I do not say that the jester exists in all times and places: the crux is rather that he is not the product of any particular time or place. The preconditions for the emergence of jesters are minimal—some courtlike institution in the form of a head honcho with a partly dependent entourage" (xvii). Michael André Bernstein's *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* attempts to counter the seductiveness of the wise fool or Saturnalian hero, explaining how the figure gives rise in later modernity to a dangerous variant, "the abject hero," and how it can be used rhetorically to paint violence like

Charles Manson's as carnivalesque rebellion. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* surveys buffoon types; and the fool, clown, and rogue appear prominently in Mikhail Bakhtin's accounts of the carnivalesque.

For the most part the current study will take a different approach to the subject, one less concerned with the history of the fool as a social institution or literary type. Bakhtin helps to explain why:

[T]hese three dialogic categories [gay deception, malicious distortion, and naive incomprehension] that had organized heteroglossia [speech diversity] in the novel at the dawn of its history emerge in modern times with extraordinary surface clarity and are embodied in the symbolic images of the rogue, the clown and the fool. In their further development these categories are refined, differentiated, cut loose from their external and symbolically static images, but they continue to preserve their importance for organizing novel style. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 405)

I follow Bakhtin in viewing language dialogically—that is, I understand the meaning of utterances through their responsive and anticipatory relationships to other actual and potential utterances, and I link utterances to definite speaking positions that entail different ideologies. Bakhtin suggests here that the speaking positions of the fool, clown, and rogue, their roles in dialogue or their associated “dialogic categories,” are separable from their “external and symbolically static images,” and that at some point in the literary history of modernity the positions do in fact separate from the symbols and images. Although this dissertation does not maintain Bakhtin's distinctions between the fool, clown, and rogue, employing instead the single figure of the wise fool, it proposes the rise of the British realist novel as a moment during which the dialogic category of wise folly acquires greater literary importance than caps and bells,

motley coats, phallic sceptres, or any other instances of the carnivalesque symbolism Bakhtin explores. We will see that this imagery does not altogether vanish, and Chapter Four will dabble in typology in order to consider the function of two wise fool characters in *Waverley* and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, but the autonomy of wise folly as a dialogic category or role means that wise folly is not always performed by characters who have a consistent identity as wise fools. Wise folly may be performed by different characters at different moments and by the narrators of realist novels, whom, like Harry Shaw, I usually see as “creatural” and in possession of human traits even when less directly characterized than intradiegetic characters.¹ (The Christian resonances of “creatural” suggest a fallen existence, which is relevant: the state of irreducible folly that wise folly imagines can be understood as a secular version of original sin, though wise folly often promises no external saving grace.) Wise folly may, finally, be attributed to the author, the implied author, the intentionality of the work, or its design. Some such concept will be necessary to this study, which deliberately and self-consciously employs a mode of intentional reading throughout in order to describe what the function of wise folly in realism appears to be.

Spelling out the assumptions of this mode of reading will also clarify what it means to talk of wise folly as a performance, role, dialogic category or—perhaps the best but most troublesome term—a form. I draw from Jonathan Loesberg’s reinterpretation of Kant in *A Return to Aesthetics* in order to conceive of form as the iterable components of a design, apprehending that design hypothetically as an *appearance* of design without assuming the intentions of a real designer. Such a design may be coextensive with a particular work, but it may also be

¹ See, for example, *Narrating Reality* p. 246: “As the narrator of *Scenes of Clerical Life* moves from ‘Gilfil’ to ‘Janet’s Repentance,’ we see her giving up a position that allows her the imaginative freedom to create a detached imitation of the past, in exchange for the moral force that stems from our amazement that such an immensely intelligent and peripatetic intellectual presence is willing to submit to the creatural limits of a given time and place.”

coextensive with a larger category or cluster of phenomena, so that one may talk both of the form of a realist novel and the realist novel as a form. Loesberg's aesthetics will receive more detailed treatment at the end of Chapter Five, where it will help to specify the hero's approach to the phenomenal world in Kipling's *Kim* and the approach to reading realist novels that this dissertation proposes. For now it is important to state that the end to which I apply aesthetic theory, and the formalist method I derive from it, is description: the purpose of the following chapters will not be to locate or assess the beauty of works, but to describe their features, and those of the generic category that contains them, in a way that becomes possible when they are apprehended aesthetically, their apparent designs traced and articulated. If my readings help to make beauty or other aesthetic qualities of these works available, they will do so as a side-effect. Forms in this project have the ontological status of geometrical shapes apprehended in the material world: circles do not exist in the same sense that wheels do, but circles describe wheels. The crucial difference, which prevents this analogy from claiming for literary criticism the rigour of mathematical description, is that shapes have stable definitions within the coherent language of mathematics, while I take literary form to be defined dialogically in an ongoing discursive process that occurs in historical time. The meaning of comedy, for instance, inheres neither in any particular comedy nor in any theoretical definition of it, but is negotiated by authors, theorists, critics, and instructors, who contribute to a social understanding of the form by instantiating it, writing about it, and teaching it. This project draws from prior accounts of realism and examines works usually considered realist in order to propose a new understanding of what constitutes realism.

The fool is an agent of carnivalesque "uncrowning," in Bakhtin's term, a joyful ritual destruction of the old and its authority. My argument, therefore, branches from George Levine's

in *The Realistic Imagination*, where he claims that disenchantment, especially of the conventions and ideals of romance, is a central aim of realism. This view of realism makes the genre into a “quest beyond words, against literature” that is ultimately futile, if self-consciously so (Levine 22). This quest resembles the quest for wisdom, seen from the point of view of wise folly: one can only become further entrapped in the paradoxes of the form, the margin of wisdom fading forever and forever as one moves, leaving only manifold follies to be discovered. The crucial difference between my argument and Levine’s is that I do not consider realism itself to be asserting univocally the premises of wise folly or to be engaged in a struggle to escape the fictionality and conventionality that it must necessarily employ. Imagining that one approaches reality through language and conventions, realism uses the language and conventions of wise folly to organize the approaches to reality that it represents. Realism in this view is still extremely self-conscious, but far less anxious and self-conflicted, since it is not itself attempting to capture a reality definitively, or even primarily to “explore or create a new reality” (20). Though a realist novel does posit a reality, which I will refer to as the “imagined reality,” it explores not this reality itself but differing, sometimes incommensurable views of it. This emphasis on the processes through which one (always among others) attempts to understand reality recalls Shaw’s *Narrating Reality*. For Shaw, realism does not transparently or exactly represent moments in history, but represents historicity and the metonymic connections between things, engaging its readers with the experience of life in history: “For the central claim of realist fiction is that the set of mental operations it elicits in us can adequately apprehend the reality of society as it moves through history” (*Narrating Reality* 16). The current study owes much in its treatment of the realist novel to Shaw’s work, including an emphasis on human narrators, a recognition that realist novels “are doing work with respect to the real world that more abstract

modes of thought can't do," and, consequently, a determination not to allow the abstraction of theoretical terms and claims to obscure or homogenize the peculiarities of realist works (ix).

In arguing for the perspectivalism of realism, I am in dialogue with a third important book about the form, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth's *Realism and Consensus in the Realist Novel*, which theorizes realism on an analogy with realistic perspective in early modern visual art. Ermarth suggests that the realist narrator functions to establish the identity of objects in "neutral" time and space. With the advent of realistic representation, "The details that formerly were understood as discrete cases now come to be understood as partial expressions of hidden wholes: wholes, or identities, which are independent of any particular form of visual apprehension or, as in the novel, of apprehension by a single consciousness in a single moment" (Ermarth 16). The wholes are hidden in that objects cannot be seen from all perspectives at once, but consensus is possible in realistic time and space—everyone would theoretically see the same thing from the same perspective. The narrator functions to establish the possibility of this consensus: "The narrator's privilege is . . . an extension of ordinary consciousness, one theoretically available to anyone able to go the distance" (71). This account of realism explains how realist works posit imagined realities that are understood to exist independently of the narrator's single perspective: "While the single point of view . . . is essential to the rationalization both of sight and of consciousness, still both the spectator and the narrator look upon a world they have not made" (85). In contrast to Ermarth, however, my concern, undoubtedly influenced by a Bakhtinian predisposition, is with the possibility of dissent more than the possibility of consensus. The consensus that Ermarth discusses is purely theoretical, a way to establish the persistence of an imagined reality that contains the diegesis. But she requires the narrator to be "Nobody" and the formal patterning of a realist novel to belong to no-one in order for realism to succeed: "To the

extent that the narrator takes personal possession of these forms, as Thackeray's narrator does for a moment at the end of *Vanity Fair*, their realism is compromised, they are unrealized because their projective extension, their futurity, is compromised" (84). I will argue presently that Thackeray's narrator's possession of *Vanity Fair*, as a place, a performance, and a way of seeing, creates a characteristic nineteenth-century British realism by foregrounding not the imagined reality, where perspectives may theoretically converge, but individuated perspective itself.

Meredith, Eliot, Scott, and Kipling function in this dissertation as cases: they are not meant to be a representative or necessary selection, except possibly the paragonal Eliot, without whose inclusion the argument would be incomplete; nor do they illustrate a historical narrative. These authors' works are continuous enough to motivate general theoretical claims and different enough to demonstrate the various ways that wise folly can be deployed in realist novels, according to each author's brand of realism. These authors are historically important, but many important British realists are not represented here, perhaps most notably Charles Dickens, whom one might rightly expect to be a practitioner of wise folly, though his relationship to the form is complicated to the degree that his relationship to realism is complicated. It will not be possible to examine novels by Dickens and other writers in detail in this project; its general claims, accordingly, are not intended to assimilate realism to a single rigid model. As Levine writes, "The variousness of the manifestations of realism make anything short of a detailed study of all the novels a distortion, yet I think certain patterns are discernible" (*The Realistic Imagination* 22). Wise folly is one of these patterns.

The formal category of wise folly, unlike that of realism, does not already belong to an explicit critical tradition. It does, however, express continuities among a diverse variety of works. In theorizing wise folly, therefore, I will often turn to practical touchstones instead of to a

body of existing theory, and will do so here in this introductory chapter. Erasmus and Shakespeare are the landmark theorist-practitioners of wise folly, and European Renaissance humanism is the crucible of the form, fusing together Christian and classical elements of it. In *Praise of Folly*, the goddess Moria makes a universalizing gesture similar to Bierce's, proposing folly as the definitive human condition and asserting herself as the "'Alpha' of all the gods" (19). Her first move after introducing herself and her genealogy is to claim sex, and thus procreation, under her domain: even gods and philosophers must "be fond and foolish for a while" if they want to generate life, and the "propagator of the human race is that part which is so foolish and absurd that it can't be named without raising a laugh" (19-20). To laugh at bawdy is to take a humorous view of sex, and Folly parlays this view into a major premise for her claims about humanity's essential folly.

Folly's next move is to argue for the importance of folly in all of life, not just at the origin of it, particularly the necessity of folly to pleasure:

But I shouldn't claim much by saying that I'm the seed and source of existence unless I could also prove that whatever advantages there are all throughout life are all provided by me. What would this life be, or would it seem worth calling life at all, if its pleasure was taken away? I hear your applause, and in fact I've always felt sure that none of you was so wise or rather so foolish—no, I mean so wise—as to think it could. (21)

The double about-face of "I've always felt sure that none of you was so wise or rather so foolish—no, I mean so wise" exemplifies how wise folly operates on its central ethical binary. Folly's uncertainty about the proper adjective arises from the instability of the ethical stance she is meant to represent. The terms "wisdom" and "folly" remain antithetical to each other, but slip

into each other's position unexpectedly. Stoic philosophers are "wise" to think life is worth living without pleasure, because they are pretending to superior wisdom in holding themselves aloof from the pleasures of the world. By correcting the word "wise" to "foolish," Folly enacts a conventional Saturnalian reversal: those who hold themselves to be wise are dialogically accused of foolishness by a heckling interlocutor. Because Folly is Folly, however, and is supposed to consider foolishness to be wisdom, she returns to "wise," which now means a wisdom achieved through foolishness. These philosophers become "*morosophoi*," or "foolish-wise," a term which parodies "philosophers" (13). But the philosophers themselves are no different whether Folly calls them wise, foolish, or a different sort of wise, and we can see how these terms might chase each other in a circle perpetually: Folly could have replaced the second "wise" with "foolish" on the same grounds she revised the first one.

A. H. T. Levi claims that Erasmus's mock encomium has an "imperfect unity of tone," since at times Folly appears to be speaking Erasmus's beliefs directly and at times she appears to be reversing them ironically (xv). This imperfect unity is crucial to Folly's role. Folly's discourse is incoherent, but it is a controlled incoherence that allows Folly to give the terms "wisdom" and "folly" contradictory senses in different contexts. Because of this incoherence Folly is more than an inversion function that simply articulates the opposite of whatever Erasmus intends. Rather, Folly is a remarkably versatile mask for Erasmus, who can combine in one document a celebration of life, sex, food, and drink; a sarcastic attack on corruption in the Roman Catholic church, including Pope Julius II's war-waging; and a defense of Christian virtue as a turning-away from the world and worldly knowledge. Of these three stages in the work the second is the easiest to make sense of, since it is a targeted satire (though even here Folly at times condemns the church leadership and at times praises it sarcastically). The other two stages express more

general world-views that are altogether at odds with each other. Levi argues that “Folly’s final panegyric of unlettered Christian piety is the entirely serious if now mature derivative of his [Erasmus’s] boyhood piety,” which is to suggest that Erasmus is not in solidarity with Folly in the first stage of the work and is speaking through her in the third (x). Yet the form that shapes Folly’s discourse by making wisdom and folly into an unstable compound creates a rich potential of meaning in the work that cannot be explained purely in terms of Erasmus’s specific beliefs. *Praise of Folly* is a strangely dialogical monologue. It permits readings that are inconsistent with Erasmus’s particular religious beliefs, but this possibility itself seems consonant with the most generous attitudes of his evangelical humanism, which respects even pagan thinkers for their thought and maintains that they will not be damned for their beliefs (xxxix). When we are caught in the encomium’s dizzying structure, where wisdom becomes folly which becomes wisdom again, we can only get so far by wondering what Erasmus really intended at every point—in the end, we may have no good option but to consider what Folly says, and make up our own minds.

The effect of deploying wise folly in a work is not necessarily to stage a carnivalesque rejection of authority, but almost always to complicate the distribution of authority, which introduces the possibility of dialogue. Though Chaucer does not use the language of wise folly that Erasmus will develop, he creates a persona that functions similarly to Erasmus’s goddess. “The House of Fame” is spoken by “Geffrey,” a fictionalized Chaucer and an ostensibly incompetent poet who is especially incompetent at love poetry. In a dream vision Geffrey is visited by an eagle whom Jove has sent to aid him since in the eagle’s words “ful lyte” is inside Geffrey’s head (621). The problem, according to the eagle, is that Geffrey spends all his time working and buried in books. He has never experienced love himself, and he has heard no real

“tydynges / Of Loves folk” (644-45). So the fantastical eagle takes him to the House of the Goddess Fame where he can hear some tydynges.

Geffrey’s foolishness is in his poetic naiveté, which is associated with a sexual innocence, and therefore his suitability as the speaker of the “House of Fame” is called into question. The admixture of wisdom in Geffrey’s folly becomes apparent, however, when he arrives at the House of Fame. Ranged on pillars of various metals are historians and great poets such as Homer, Ovid, and Virgil, who literally support on their shoulders the fame of the heroes and gods they sang. The pillars represent the stature of the epic poet, whose fame is implicated with that of the epic subject in a guarantee of mutual greatness. An unsuccessful love poet, Geffrey has no place in this allegorical tableau. And precisely because Geffrey is not on a pillar, he can walk around unencumbered.

The gain in Geffrey’s loss is not merely freedom from the burdens of fame but an alternative model of poetic speech. When an anonymous person at the goddess’s court asks Geffrey if he has come to win fame, the humble poet replies in a decisive negative. Geffrey disclaims all interest in making a reputation for himself or, more literally, putting his name in the hands of others. Moreover, he imagines that he can drink up his own lived experiences and thoughts, swallow them into himself instead of sharing them in his poetry, and suggests that this self-cannibalism is consistent with his understanding of his craft. All of which is a loose paraphrase of the following speech:

Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
That no wight have my name in honde.
I wot myself best how y stonde;
For what I drye, or what I thynke,

I wil myselven al hyt drynke,

Certeyn, for the more part,

As fer forth as I kan myn art. (1876-82)

Clearly Geoffrey understands his craft differently than does Jove's eagle, who would prefer Geoffrey to base his poetry in his real knowledge and experience. Geoffrey's apparent self-abnegation, however, is ambiguously also a self-assertion. With only a shift of emphasis in the reading of this speech, the modest Geoffrey becomes strident, vehemently protecting himself from his readers. (*I kan myn art!*) A posture of "Oh, don't mind me" precariously coexists with a hint of "How *dare* you mind me" that is anything but self-effacing.

This desire to detach his life and his identity from his own speech belongs to Geoffrey as a character, but of course insofar as Geoffrey is the speaker of this dream vision, he is not succeeding: what he narrates is his own quest, as a character, to become a better poet. The underlying logic resembles that of *occupatio*, a favourite figure of Chaucer's which consists in his promising that he will not do precisely what he is doing. Geoffrey has tangled up "The House of Fame" with the problem of his own status and authority such that the poem we are reading, ironically, cannot be independent of Geoffrey in the way he ostensibly wishes his poetry to be. But neither does Geoffrey the speaker exemplify the eagle's model of poetic creation: he is not quite reporting his own lived experience or anyone else's. He is reporting a dream vision, and he admits he does not know whether it is a true revelation or, as it were, an undigested bit of beef. The dream vision allows Chaucer's wise-foolish narrator to be authorial, explicitly at the origin of the story, but also peripheral and passive. He claims that his "Thought" wrote the dream and shut it in the "tresorye" of his "brayn," to which he evidently does not have a key (523-25). Consequently, in this poem, Geoffrey can defy the eagle's complaints. It does not matter what the

poet knows or has experienced: in his vision he sees what he sees; and as speaker he speaks it. At the same time, by displacing authority from himself, Geoffrey gives an illusion of autonomy to the story: for example, when relating Dido's lament for Aeneas, which Geoffrey witnesses in the first part of his vision, he insists that he repeats Dido's words just as he dreamt them: "Non other auctour alegge I" (314). Geoffrey's poetic incompetence allows him to filch the story of Aeneas and Dido off of Virgil's tinned iron pillar, to dialogize it by creating a version of it in his own voice and out of his own thought, while partially disguising the presumption of this act by claiming that he merely dreamt it.

The foregoing examples demonstrate wise folly in use, deployed specifically to shape the discourses of the works' speaking personae, allowing these speakers to initiate dialogues with other discourses of authority without simply setting up warring authorities. Wise folly is useful for this purpose because it characterizes the speakers of the works as ambiguously both wise and foolish, mitigating the authority that would normally accrue to them by virtue of their being the works' sole speakers. This function of wise folly is perhaps the most important to the realist novel, where wise folly informs narrators who, far from providing the definitive word on the worlds or "diegeses" of their fictions, initiate ethical dialogues with their readers about these worlds and, by analogy, the worlds of the readers. The following two examples suggest a narrative of how, in the development of the British novel, speaking positions such as Folly's and Geoffrey's become integral to realist narrative discourse. The first is Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, a precursor to the nineteenth-century British novel with components of Menippean satire or "anatomy" (Frye 312).² The second is William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, perhaps

² "Tristram Shandy may be . . . a novel, but the digressing narrative, the catalogues, the stylizing of character along 'humor' lines, the marvellous journey of the great nose, the symposium discussions, and the constant ridicule of philosophers and pedantic critics are all features that belong to the anatomy" (Frye 312). Menippean satire is, for

the nineteenth-century British realist novel in which the symbolic heritage of wise folly remains most in evidence. Both narrators portray themselves as jester-performers, and they use their performances to trouble any ready distinctions between their narrative discourses and the stories they tell, making the wise folly of their narration into a defining property of the narratives.

Tristram explains his digressive narrative style with reference to a fool's cap:

Therefore, my dear friend and companion, if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out,—bear with me,—and let me go on, and tell my story my own way:—or if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road,—or should sometimes put on a fool's cap with a bell to it, for a moment or two as we pass along,—don't fly off,—but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears on my outside;—and as we jogg on, either laugh with me, or at me, or in short, do any thing,—only keep your temper. (Sterne 10-11)

This is one of two occasions when Tristram mentions his hat. The fool's cap is part of a live performance that Tristram imagines himself to be giving even as he writes: at times he will refer to his pen and ink, and at other times he will interact with a variety of addressees, including at least one man, one woman, and one young girl. *Tristram Shandy* is much like *Praise of Folly* in that it is writing masquerading as speech. Like Erasmus, Sterne forms his work by means of an idiosyncratic speaker and defines this speaker through the language and images of wise folly: in donning the fool's cap and claiming “a little more wisdom than appears on my outside,” Tristram clearly situates himself in the position of the wise fool. Tristram is in other respects like Chaucer's personas: Tristram combines the paradoxes of Folly's rhetoric with the creative and

Bakhtin, one of the carnivalesque sources of the novel, and its tendency to target human intellectual effort in its satire places it within the history of wise folly.

narrative burdens of the Chaucerian poet. Like a hyperbolic Geoffrey, Tristram has trouble with the creative process and produces a story that is itself a record of this trouble. Tristram's odd approach to autobiography is part of a general oddity that is frequently allied with suggestions of sexual inadequacy: the story of his misfortunes, including his interrupted conception, his crushed nose, his truncated name, and his circumcision by a sash window, is largely the story of "things be[ing] cut shorter" (Shakespeare, *King Lear* 1.1.50).³ Unlike Geoffrey, however, Tristram has no desire to "drynke" from his work all that pertains to himself. On the contrary, the work is supposed to be about Tristram, and his difficulty is in deciding how to tell his story.

What is unique about Tristram's combination of the wise-foolish forms we have seen in Erasmus and Chaucer is how completely these forms shape his narrative. Tristram explains the structure of this narrative in Volume 1: "the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time" (Sterne 58). Tristram's paradox can be solved by redefining progression and digression. He presumes the view of narrative that narratology expresses in the terms "story" and "discourse."⁴ There's the story, and there's the telling of it, and if we think of *Tristram Shandy* this way then there's lots of telling and little story; Tristram takes volumes to cover his birth. This excess in the narrative discourse is its digressiveness. To view the digressions as progressive is to view the telling as the story, to refuse to separate them. *Tristram Shandy* is the story of Tristram's communicative act, and this story progresses as long as Tristram writes (or

³ If I read the blanks rightly, at one point Jenny also consoles Tristram for impotence: "the most oppressive [disaster] of its kind which could befall me as a man, proud, as he ought to be, of his manhood" (Sterne 415).

⁴ Because "discourse" will most frequently be used in Bakhtin's sense, to indicate a linguistic unity or way of speaking (the particular language of a character, of wise folly, of narratology, for example), the phrase "narrative discourse" will be used where narratological usage simply calls for "discourse." An exception will be the related term "discourse space," which is not liable to create the same confusion.

speaks). In asking us to befriend him, to bear with him, to laugh either with or at him, Tristram also suggests that the telling is inseparable from the *teller*: to read *Tristram Shandy* is to become acquainted with an eccentric person who has assumed the mask of the wise fool.

Tristram Shandy suggests a model of the novel as a dialogue between the narrator and the reader. Tristram's speaking position, in all its strangeness and complexity, informs every aspect of the novel. Tristram invites us to take our place opposite this speaking position; he encourages an active reading in which we participate as persons, not mere receptors. In addition to his direct addresses and overtures of friendship, Tristram uses euphemisms, blanks, and oblique descriptions to get us to fill in the gaps. He wishes us to "think as well as read" (49). Later narrators of the novel may be less idiosyncratic than Tristram, apparently more successful at the self-erasure that Geoffrey strives for, but Tristram is an important step in the development of even the extradiegetic heterodiegetic realist narrator, that disembodied narrator traditionally named "omniscient." In novels by Scott, Eliot, Meredith, and Kipling, the narrative discourse is similarly central to the narrative and, despite appearances, similarly shaped by wise folly.

The narrator of *Vanity Fair* will provide a link between *Tristram Shandy* and, for instance, George Eliot's apparently magisterial narrators. Thackeray's narrator does not tell his own story, but he does frequently intrude as the author of it. He teases the narratee with his power to manipulate the puppets of the diegesis and to "know everything," as he puts it. At other times, he seems briefly like an intradiegetic character collecting gossip: he attributes his information about Gaunt Square, for example, to his "informant" Tom Eaves (Thackeray 589). Once, in a memorable episode, the narrator even claims to have met the protagonists of *Vanity Fair* personally in Germany: "It was on this very tour that I, the present writer of a history of which every word is true, had the pleasure to see them first, and to make their acquaintance"

(793). One way to reconcile these different narrative roles is to recognize the cheek of the narrator's speech. It is clear enough that the narrator's claims, in his authorial capacity, to "know everything" and tell the truth should be taken with a grain or two of salt. Not only Tom Eaves but also kitchen staff in general are said to "know everything" in *Vanity Fair*, as is the minor character Tapeworm, who "knew everything—and a great deal besides, about all the world" (849). What is constant about this narrator is that he is a duplicitous performer whose function does not quite reduce to any of the contradictory roles he plays.

This deliberately playful narrator does not share Geoffrey or Tristram's anxieties about writing. Thackeray situates him in the context of carnivalesque allusions, however: explicit references to the symbolism of wise folly that appears more rarely elsewhere in the British realist novel. The covers of the monthly numbers of *Vanity Fair* depict a clown on a barrel preaching to a crowd of fellow clowns, and the illustration at the end of Chapter IX is a miniature self-portrait of Thackeray with mask and fool's sceptre. The narrator also reminds us of his heritage occasionally, addressing the narratees as "my friend in motley" or "brother wearers of motley" (769, 227). Most importantly, however, Thackeray frames the novel with the image of the puppet show, which he develops in a section entitled "Before the Curtain." Here the "Manager of the Performance" appears on stage in a literalized *Vanity Fair* to introduce a puppet show that stands in for the story of the novel. The narration is extradiegetic and heterodiegetic, but focalized through the Manager, who looks out over the fair: "not a moral place certainly; nor a merry one, though very noisy" (1). The narrator of the novel is not the same as the Manager, but the roles are analogous, and the unstable metaphor of the Fair captures the complexity of the narrator's position.

First of all, *Vanity Fair* is the story space: as the narrator uses the term in the novel, it is the fictional world of sin and folly in which Becky Sharp, Amelia Sedley, and the other characters live their circumscribed lives. But in the prologue, *Vanity Fair* is also the discourse space, the space of the Manager of the Performance, who stands on a stage between the audience and the puppet show.⁵ Furthermore, the Fair extends beyond the Manager's stage. The audience, too, is in *Vanity Fair*, which is therefore also an analogue of the real world. The capaciousness of the Fair, realized metaphorically in the prologue, is what bridges the novel's insistently arbitrary story and its sweeping social satire: the world of Becky Sharp corresponds ostensibly to *our* world—the human folly under examination is ours as well. But aligning our world and Becky's under the name “*Vanity Fair*” requires a sleight of hand, which does not suffer when we know the trick. In order to accomplish this deft manipulation of theoretical space, the narrator must stand where the Manager does, before the curtain but part of *Vanity Fair*, a fool like the ones on the stage and the ones off of it, mediating between the Fair in which his audience finds itself and that in which the puppets act. This position is tenuous. Just as Geoffrey is not quite the master of his dream, the narrator is not quite the master of *Vanity Fair*: he knows the story, most of the time, but he is also subject to his own metaphor of the Fair and its imposition of a universal foolishness.

There are limits to the Fair, finally, which are likewise limits to the narrator's discourse. In the novel the narrator frequently talks about *Vanity Fair* as if it were synonymous with *the* world, one world—that of the real readers as well as the characters. But it is more accurate to say that *Vanity Fair* is what lies within the horizon of the narrator's vision. Like Harry Shaw's “loose

⁵ Seymour Chatman's terms “discourse space” and “story space” apply a spatial metaphor to the narrative discourse and the story: the discourse space is where the narrator is imagined to exist during the time of the narration, while the story space is where the action of the story is imagined to exist. See Chatman, p.96. In this study “the diegesis” will most often be used instead of “story space” to designate the imagined world of the fiction without implying the narrator's necessary existence in a separate, contrasting space.

narrator,” the wise-foolish narrator can imitate or perform the kind of human, situated, value-inflected vision that a character in story space might have, even while narrating what a human character could never know.⁶ Thackeray’s narrator indicates the limit of his vision—or, in this case his hearing—when he declines to narrate the thoughts of Amelia, who is pining for her husband George: “Have we a right to repeat or overhear her prayers? These, brother, are secrets, and out of the domain of *Vanity Fair*, in which our story lies” (321). Tapeworm, remember, “knew everything—and a lot more besides.” The idea behind this joke, that there’s everything and then there’s *everything*, is fundamental to the design of *Vanity Fair*. The vision of a realist narrator, his or her peculiar take on the world, can have the appearance of totality, of accounting for a whole reality by capturing it in the diegesis. But Thackeray uses his wise-foolish narrator openly to expose this totality as a performance even as he performs it, to make the novel more like a dream vision of human folly than an attempt to judge the human condition. The Fair may extend beyond the Manager’s stage, but the Manager knows that his audience comes to the Fair from somewhere else, whence we return when the play is played out.

In the other realist novels that will be examined, the narrator does not explicitly adopt the accoutrements of the wise fool, but the narrative discourse does similarly present the diegesis as if it were the narrator’s version of some independent reality. In other words, what is represented in nineteenth-century British realism is a narrator’s attempt to represent a reality; reality itself is not the primary object of representation. The Middlemarch of *Middlemarch* is a different kind of *Vanity Fair*, another interpretation of human life by a significantly different interpreter. Wise folly provides the mechanisms by which the narrator’s vision can be established as idiosyncratic and limited, however synoptic and universal it sometimes appears to aspire to be. This study

⁶ Loose narrators are those who, though considered to be in discourse space, seem to enter story space, to simulate entering it, or otherwise to threaten the border between the spaces as classical narratology draws it. See Shaw, “Loose Narrators: Display, Engagement, and a Search for a Place in History in Realist Fiction.”

begins, therefore, by concentrating on specific issues of narrative discourse, and moves outwards progressively towards character and plot, intertextuality, and ideology, though at every point the narrative discourse of realist novels will be of central importance.

The second chapter, “Narrative Authority and George Meredith’s Gnomes,” revises the authoritative status of realist narration. Focusing on aphorisms, epigrams, and maxims in novels including *Diana of the Crossways*, *The Egoist*, and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, this chapter argues that such gnomic utterances belong to a discourse of wise folly, of tongue-in-cheek claims to wisdom: these “gnomes” challenge the possibility of summing up truths about reality in pithy sentences even as they attempt to do so. More broadly, Meredith’s theories and practices of comedy and realism exclude the possibility of wholly authoritative speech about reality by subjecting individual wisdom to correction within a larger, comic social consciousness.

The third chapter, “George Eliot’s Pharmacy,” builds on the first chapter’s analysis of narrative authority to explain how characters resist the ethical frameworks imposed on them by narrative discourse. I use the term “*pharmakos*,” to which Jacques Derrida and Northrop Frye have given related meanings, to describe the ambiguous and subversive status of the scapegoat figures that are subjugated by the hierarchies of Eliot’s novels. From the margins of their novels characters such as Hans Meyrick in *Daniel Deronda* and Bob Jakin in *The Mill on the Floss* launch critiques of the values at the centre, namely of the doctrine of sympathy. Turning to Eliot’s late work *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, a collection of essays attributed to an unsuccessful scholar who parodies Eliot’s usual learned narration, the chapter argues that there is a slippage between insiders and outsiders in Eliot’s work, between narrators and marginal characters, just as there is a slippage between the *pharmakeus* and the *pharmakos*, the druggist or sorcerer and the victim of a healing sacrifice.

The fourth chapter, “Learning We Are Fools,” taking into account the first two chapters’ arguments about authority and ethics in novels, examines the pedagogical role of literature and intertexts. In a novel that thematizes the literary education of its hero, such as Scott’s *Waverley* or Meredith’s *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, literary quotations become part of the network of discourses that influence the hero. Partly through fool characters such as Davie Gellatley and Adrian Harley these novels consider the possibility that reading can delude instead of educating. These novels thus examine their own pedagogical effects. Yet they offer no easy alternative to Quixote’s path, since they depict education as an intertextual process, fraught with corruption, distortion, and misreading, through which one borrows forms of thought from texts.

The argument culminates in the fifth chapter, “If: Aesthetics and Ideology Revisited,” which examines the relationship between aesthetics and ideology in Rudyard Kipling’s fiction, especially his novel *Kim*. As critics have recognized, *Kim* practices an ethnography that contributes to the British imperial project by creating mastering knowledge about colonized peoples. Through narrative, discursive, and characterological strategies, however, *Kim* also launches a sophisticated critique of knowledge, one that distinguishes between ways of knowing, such as ethnology and proverbs, and that also imagines all forms of knowing to be limited. Kim himself illustrates an alternative means of engaging with the phenomenal world, an aesthetic apprehension that is receptive to particularity, but does not foreclose action. Similarly, this chapter and the dissertation as a whole treat realist novels as a source not merely for ideological commitments about reality or sheer play, but for complex forms of understanding through which readers may choose what commitments to make.

Chapter Two

Narrative Authority and George Meredith's Gnomes

Platitude, *n.* The fundamental element and special glory of popular literature. A thought that snores in words that smoke. The wisdom of a million fools in the diction of a dullard. A fossil sentiment in artificial rock. A moral without the fable. All that is mortal of a departed truth. A demi-tasse of milk-and-morality. The Pope's-nose of a featherless peacock. A jelly-fish withering on the shore of the sea of thought. The cackle surviving the egg. A desiccated epigram. (Bierce, "Platitude")

1. Realist Narration and the Burden of Authority

I suggested in Chapter One that wise folly in the British realist novel is most importantly a function of the narrator. Realist narrators mediate between the space of the characters and the space of the reader, simultaneously implying a world that the reader may come to know, and defining the limits of the reader's access to that world. If the realist novel performs wise folly, if it renders the terms of ethical and hierarchical distinctions ambiguous even as it inscribes them, then the narrator is, wittingly or not, a central player in this performance. It may seem capricious to liken the typical realist narrator, variously called third-person omniscient or extradiegetic and heterodiegetic, to the wise fools of a carnival tradition. These narrators are more sovereign than clown. Their acute intelligences imitate their authors', and their narrative discourse appears to define the ethical hierarchies of novels and arbitrate between characters' discourses. This chapter will argue that ascribing such final authority to the realist narrator is not a necessary reading

practice, and that the narrator's seeming authority is best considered a performance that displaces authority onto the reader.

This argument will take its examples from George Meredith's novels, especially *Diana of the Crossways*, *The Egoist*, and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. Though Meredith's work is too experimental in form to be simply representative of Victorian realism, the same pronounced self-consciousness that makes Meredith appear exceptional and even proto-modernist makes his novels an excellent site for investigating the means and ends of realism. Meredith uses the resources of other literary forms, especially comedy, to craft a realism that has little to do with naturalism, the representation of gritty life, or "the dirty drab," and more to do with "philosophy," an exercise of intellection that, in wise-foolish spirit, Meredith both valorizes and satirizes (*Diana* 15). Meredith's self-critical narrators are our best source of explicit insight into his realism and his chief tool for creating it. This realism, it will become clear, is more compatible with modernist and post-modern sensibilities than Victorian realism is ordinarily taken to be. Though it is tempting to ascribe this compatibility to Meredith's own modernism, Chapter Three will trace the continuities in the other direction, extending the argument of this chapter to George Eliot's more clearly typical realism.

Meredith's ambiguous periodicity is also useful because it helps us to examine how differences between Victorian and modernist practices have informed literary criticism of realist narration. Modernist novelists, especially Henry James, tended to reject the intrusive and judgmental narrator, preferring to use narration as a means to represent the consciousness of individual characters in finer detail. Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* responds to this shift by defending and normalizing judgmental narration: according to Booth's early theory of narrative rhetoric, all narration is judgmental, inflected with the values of an implied author who

seeks to persuade the reader of certain ethical truths. Though Booth treats this goal as inevitable, acceptable, and even desirable, his theory only makes clearer why nineteenth-century intrusive narration would have seemed offensive to modernist taste. If these narrators carry out their implied authors' rhetorical missions more baldly and insistently than the narrators of modernist novels do, then Roland Barthes is right to associate the nineteenth-century novel with the "classic text," the "readerly" text, the text that constrains the plurality of its meaning and the creativity of its reader more than the "modern text," which aspires to the pluralistic ideal of the "writerly." The assertive authorial narrator of the typical realist novel appears to provide the speech "origin" that for Barthes is definitively classic: "In modern texts, the voices are so treated that any reference is impossible: the discourse, or better, the language, speaks: nothing more. By contrast, in the classic text the majority of the utterances are assigned an origin, we can identify their parentage, who is speaking: either a consciousness (of a character, of the author) or a culture (the anonymous is still an origin, a voice: the voice we find, for example, in the gnomic code)" (*S/Z* 41). Who speaks? In the realist novel, the narrator does, and if as Booth's theory suggests the narrator speaks for the implied author, then the British realist novel is the epitome of the readerly, which robs readers of our own writerly activity in reading. To be sure, Barthes does not *identify* the realist novel with the readerly text, and his purpose in *S/Z* is largely to find what is writerly in Balzac's "classic" *Sarrasine*. The readerly and the writerly are ideals—a text is never one or the other. Nevertheless an association, less nuanced than Barthes's, of realism with the readerly has become the ground on which debates about narrative authority take place, and the ground itself is rarely questioned. From their different positions Booth and Barthes both suggest that realism, in opposition to modernism, aspires to a special narrative authority that is in one view salutary and in another repulsive.

The narrative of a modernism attempting to escape, through its practices and theories of narration, from the domineering authority of nineteenth-century realism underlies current approaches to the novel. Thus can Amanda Anderson refer in passing to “omniscient realism” as a “literary form,” combining a term for a kind of narrator with a term for a kind of fiction to suggest that realist fiction as a whole aspired to the omniscience that has traditionally been attributed to the form’s most typical narrator (48). As Jonathan Culler has argued, the term “omniscient” conflates and names, inaccurately, several distinct properties of narrators. Yet Culler writes, “the examples where the best case could be made for the notion [of omniscience] are those nineteenth-century novels from George Eliot to Anthony Trollope with extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrators who present themselves as *historians*: spokespersons of authority who judiciously sift and present information, know the innermost secrets of characters, reveal what they would keep hidden, and offer sage reflections on the foibles of humankind” (31). These *historians* are the exemplary narrators of realism. Culler notes that they are not, finally, omniscient: “Unraveling and exploring are not the operations of the omniscient. They are the province of the historian, who can investigate and capaciously survey. Such narrators engage in reflection, and link such wisdom as they offer to the process of judicious rumination, while an omniscient God should not need to reflect at all: he simply knows” (31). Yet the judicious sifting and sage reflecting of these narrators appear, in some way, to depend on the possession of authority, and Culler’s phrase “spokespersons of authority” recalls Booth’s identification of the narrator’s rhetoric with the author’s.

Perhaps the most extensive account of the realist narrator’s authority appears in Susan Lanser’s *Fictions of Authority*. This book examines the precarious position of female narrative voice with respect to the norm of the public male voice and studies the dialogic strategies by

which different forms of female voice work in and around this norm in order both to resist the devices of masculine authority and to question the conventional gendering of authority *as* masculine. Lanser's treatment of the narrative norm, however, depends on the assumptions about realist narration and authority I have been outlining and would like to challenge. She claims, "One project of the realist novel . . . is to accommodate the contradictions between knowing and judging, or representation and ideology, through an unprecedented authorization of the heterodiegetic voice, which must stand against the realist novel's necessary production of 'speaking persons' whose discourses threaten to destabilize any ideological hegemony" (85). In this view the realist novel is, by default, at pains to master and monologize the dialogue of its speaking persons by setting above them an absolutely authoritative, conventionally male narrator as arbiter: this narrator warrants on the one hand that his representation of reality is accurate, and on the other that his ethical evaluations of this reality are correct. Lanser's narrator of "classic realism" thus claims a moral and rhetorical responsibility towards the reader that recalls Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* as well as Barthes's "classic text" (85). The realist narrator is, Lanser writes, "the single, extradiegetic and public voice, sole mediator of the fictional world, who occupies a 'higher' discursive plane than the characters, entering into a compact with public narratees who, if they read rightly, are privileged to share the narrator's enlightened place" (85). This enlightenment Lanser views as almost divine, implying omniscience without the name: "It is only a slight exaggeration to suggest that upon this narrator rested the demands and powers of divinity itself, trusted at once to know all and to judge aright" (85).

How does Lanser reach this model of the almost-divine narrator? Partly by induction, but because I am arguing that realist novels look quite different under a different set of assumptions, I would like to note two other (over)determining influences. Lanser's discussion of the realist

narrator repeats a familiar narrative, reinscribing the opposition between realism and modernism that underlies the work of Booth and Barthes. In this history, modernism succeeded realism and “challenged both of the narrative imperatives—knowing and judging—that I have associated with classic realism: in a world in which ‘nothing was just one thing,’ in which consciousness was understood to implicate *unconsciousness*, and in which traditional foundations of fact had been severely undermined, the project of realism was drastically compromised. The realist narrator could no longer pretend to infallibility” (104). Then came postmodernism: “while modernism understood narrative authority as conditional, postmodernism finds it a sham. Meaning is now not merely contingent but indeterminate, and the notion of a narrator as a textual ‘higher’ authority—or of any textual figure as privileged knower—becomes not merely hollow but absurd” (126). From surety to doubt to a carnivalesque openness: these are the broad lines of the history of English literature over the past two centuries, but they obscure the particularities of realist narration, which accommodates ambiguities of epistemology and ethics to a greater degree than this narrative suggests.

Current narratological terminology also buttresses the traditional view of realist narrators. The term “extradiegetic” designates a narrator who is not a character in another narrator’s story, while “heterodiegetic” designates a narrator who is not a character in his or her own story. The reliability of the extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator is difficult for the reader to assess. Homodiegetic narrators can expose their unreliability through their self-representation, as Thackeray’s Barry Lyndon does. Intradiegetic narrators such as Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* can be measured against the narration of their framing narrators. The extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator, however, is “sole mediator of the fictional world” in that he or she is outside all framing discourse (85). The sheer difficulty of judging whether such a narrator’s perspective is reliable

does not in itself endow that perspective with authority, but the spatial metaphor of being outside or beyond (*extra*) is powerful, and can encourage us to imagine a quasi-divine narrative position. Gérard Genette, who coined these narratological terms, writes, “Gil Blas is an extradiegetic narrator because, albeit fictitious, he is included (*as narrator*) in no diegesis but is on an exactly equal footing with the extradiegetic (real) public” (84). Speaking strictly of what Genette calls “level,” the position of an entity with respect to the nested narrative frames of a text, the realist narrator and the public are on “exactly” the same level—neither is embedded in any of the text’s narratives. “Equal footing” is not necessarily an ethical description. But it sounds like one.

Moreover, realist narrators can destabilize the concept of *diegesis*, as we have seen Thackeray do. They forge, in the senses both of fashioning and of falsifying, an analogy between the world of the narrative and the world of the reader. The realist narrator appears to seek a vantage external to the reader’s own reality, making the reader intradiegetic, demoting the reader to a *lower* level. From this imaginative manoeuvre, perhaps, comes the sense that this narrator is a “textual ‘higher’ authority,” that he or she speaks from an “enlightened place” to narratees that can only reach such a place by submitting to the medium of the narrator’s authority (Ermarth 126, 85). I will argue in the following sections and chapters that when the realist narrator “pretend[s] to infallibility,” he or she is best read as *pretending*, hamming it up with a greater or lesser degree of levity, and that it is important to the narrator’s operation that we catch a wink or two (104). When Anthony Trollope “suddenly winks at us and reminds us that he is telling us an arbitrary thing,” he does not destroy his realism, as Henry James believed—he creates it (James, *The Critical Muse* 117).

The crux of the realist narrator’s ostensible authority is what Lanser calls “judg[ing] aright” and Culler calls “sage reflections on the foibles of humankind” (Lanser 85; Culler 31).

Knowing all, as Culler has shown, is not really a property of any kind of narrator. The narrator's knowledge of the basic events and facts of the story is just the "constitutive convention of fiction," a performative power to make the story so, and the narrator's knowledge of characters' thoughts is a special, limited power, more like telepathy than omniscience (27, 29). A narrator who possesses such powers can occasionally lose them. At one point in *Adam Bede* George Eliot's narrator, who is usually telepathic, suddenly doesn't know what is going on in Arthur Donnithorne's mind: "Possibly there was some such unrecognized agent secretly busy in Arthur's mind at this moment—possibly it was the fear lest he might hereafter find the fact of having made a confession to the Rector a serious annoyance, in case he should *not* be able quite to carry out his good resolutions? I dare not assert that it was not so. The human soul is a very complex thing" (157). One purpose of such lapses is precisely to remind us that the narrator does not know all, and that some things, such as the workings of even an imaginary mind, are difficult to know. Once we are reminded that the narrator is limited, albeit with special access to information, we are better able to recognize as Culler does that such "sage reflections" as "The human soul is a very complex thing," are not simply matters of empirical or theoretical knowledge, but also of judgment. Culler calls the result of this judgment "wisdom," and under the conventions of wise folly wisdom implies the possibility of profound error. As Mr. Irwine says in the same chapter of *Adam Bede*, "if we wise people make eminent fools of ourselves on any particular occasion, we must endure the legitimate conclusion that we carry a few grains of folly to our ounce of wisdom" (156).

Turning to George Meredith's narrators, we will consider how their ounces imply their grains, how Meredith constructs narrators with a claim to adulterated wisdom that decentres their authority. Meredith's narrators, like George Eliot's, have sophisticated philosophies, ethics, and

social and literary theories, which they present wholesale, piecemeal, explicitly, implicitly, along with sweeping, often humorous and incisive generalizations about characters, reality, and human life. The claims the narrators make are large and clearly necessitate the authors' reflection on serious matters. Yet, while we might find these philosophies or generalizations compelling, interesting, far-sighted, beautiful, even *right*, we might also find them wrong, ugly, backwards, for many personal and historical reasons. Judging a narrator's judgment is part of the intellectual, emotional, and ethical experience of reading, which is an experience that can in turn become part of wider intellectual, emotional, and ethical exchange. My goal in this project is not primarily to make such judgments, to argue whether the wisdom of any narrator is indeed wise—for us, for the Victorians, for an age, or for all time. My aim is to help enrich our experiences of reading by accounting for contingencies in realist narrators' perspectives and the textual processes by which realist narration can, if we let it, stimulate rather than overwrite our own readerly judgment. Meredith's narrators are wise fools, masks that operate much like Erasmus's Folly. They do not merely channel the authority of an originary Author: on the contrary, they render such ultimate authority irretrievable and the most breathtaking displays of wisdom potentially foolish.

2. The Problem of Disagreeing

Realist narrators frequently overreach the basic class of narrative-statement that, as Culler notes, we conventionally accept unless given reason not to, statements which tell us that so-and-so did thus and such. Because realist novels performatively align the world of their narrative with the world of their narratees, readers are often faced with judgments that attempt to bear on our own reality. Here is a claim from *Diana of the Crossways*: "Irishmen, as far as I have seen of them, are, like horses, bundles of nerves; and you must manage them, as you do with all nervous

creatures, with firmness, but good temper” (Meredith 41). There are reasons why a reader might reject this idea. In this case, dissent is relatively inconsequential because the speaker is a character, Thomas Redworth, and he is at least half joking. Yet other judgments may appear to carry more authority in a novel, such as “when Celtic brains are reflective on their emotional vessel they shoot direct as the arrow of logic,” which is the narrator’s claim (488). If one considers the narrator to be omniscient, superlatively authoritative, or even just wise, the proposition is more difficult to dismiss—that is, dismissing it may affect our reading of the whole novel.

The narrator’s claim appears to be ethically and interpretively coercive, to imply mutually dependent judgments both of “Celtic brains” and of Diana’s impending marriage to Redworth at the end of the novel. This marriage is a crux in *Diana*, because it is not at all a tidy comic ending: Diana is a feminist, an author, an independent woman who evidently desires the conventionally masculine, athletic, and self-disciplined Redworth to a degree, but is averse to marrying him. As the subtitle of the last chapter alarmingly terms it, she is a “Barely Willing Woman . . . Led to Bloom with the Nuptial Sentiment.” The preceding chapter is subtitled “Showing a Final Struggle For Liberty and a Run Into Harness,” and when providing Diana’s point of view in free indirect discourse the narrator portrays her marriage as a “submission” to “the wedding yoke”: “She was dominated, physically and morally, submissively too” (487, 488). When the narration is focalized through Diana’s close friend Emma Dunstane, on the other hand, the marriage appears in a considerably more positive light, as “the union of the woman noble in the sight of God with a more manlike man [than Diana’s previous lover, Percy Dacier]” and “the marriage of the two noblest of human souls, one the dearest” (479, 493). In fact, it is largely because of Emma’s intercession on Redworth’s behalf that Diana, who has already refused

Redworth once, submits to his courtship and proposal: Diana “had to think of appeasing her Emma” (479). Diana portrays herself to Emma as “a sober person taking at last a right practical step, to please her two best friends” (490). She marries because she thinks it is right, not necessarily because she wants to. She responds, however, to the massive desire that she sees Redworth, one of these “best friends,” repress in a “big breath” when she kisses his arm through his coat-sleeve (489): “Imagination began busily building a nest for him, and enthusiasm was not sluggish to make a home of it” (490). Emma finds a “marked” change in Diana the next day, her wedding day, though the narrator does not describe the change beyond saying Diana is “a natural bubble of the notes”—she sings, apparently (490). The novel ends with ambiguity. When Emma, whose pet name for Diana is “Tony,” says she would like to “live long enough to be a godmother” to Diana’s future children, “There was no reply: there was an involuntary little twitch of Tony’s fingers” (494). This sentence is the novel’s last. The twitch might signify the “enthusiasm” described earlier, Diana’s awakening desire for Redworth and motherhood. It could, on the other hand, signify various other responses, including lingering resistance.

Critical treatments of this ending have been fittingly various. Gillian Beer assumes that suitability is a necessary condition to the marriage ending: “The author must convince the reader that Redworth is a fitting mate for Diana” (164). Gayla McGlamery believes that Redworth *is* a fitting mate for Diana and, though she allows that “Meredith leaves the relation between the two ever-so-slightly indeterminate,” argues that Redworth embodies the values of free and equal dialogue that the novel finally endorses: “Meredith cannot change the world Diana inhabits, nor can he imagine a circumstance in which she might educate, defend, and provide for herself independently, given the world as it was in the 1840s, or even in the 1880s when he was writing. His answer is to create a man to offer Diana the opportunities the real world did not” (486). For

Gisela Argyle, Redworth is not the best substitute for an unavailable independence; rather, Redworth is an example of the “good” paternalism that Meredith ostensibly values: “the plot concludes as comedy with the heroine’s happy marriage to him [Redworth],” and “Their anticipated offspring, prayed for by Diana’s friend Emma, symbolizes Meredith’s utopia” (987). Judith Wilt, more sympathetic to Meredith, locates the desire for this ending marriage in Diana, suggesting that she is simply not as good at reading herself as the narrator is: “He [Meredith] means to say that he has read through the layers of Diana’s very modern and freedom-loving character with all the insight and clarity of which he is capable finally to discern that she wants a Nuptial Chapter, that it is in fact her chosen ending” (74).

Despite their disagreements about its meaning and motivation, these readers all suppose Diana’s marriage to have the author’s moral approval. The narrator’s claim “when Celtic brains are reflective on their emotional vessel they shoot direct as the arrow of logic” helps to explain this supposition. Frequently in the last chapter of *Diana* the narration is focalized through Diana, Redworth, and Emma, who all think differently about the marriage, Redworth and Emma much less ambivalently than Diana. The saw about Celtic brains, however, is a typical realist intrusion into the dialogue: this is the narrative voice speaking on its own, the singular voice that we have learned to read not just as the mediator but the arbiter of the characters’ voices. At this crucial point Diana is reviewing her past with an eye to her future, and the narrator’s intrusion tells us that she sees that past, and her past self, clearly: “She was driven to the conclusion that the granting of any of her heart’s wild wishes in those days would have lowered her—or frozen” (Meredith, *Diana* 489). By suggesting that at this moment Diana’s brain is “shoot[ing] direct as the arrow of logic,” the narrator appears to agree with Diana that her “wild wishes” for Dacier were misguided and to approve her turn to Redworth as a return to her senses. If the narrator

approves, are we not meant to as well, and are we not moved to approve by the rhetoric of fiction?

Other critics of *Diana*, by beginning with different assumptions about narration, reach readings of the marriage that either do not view it as an ethical problem or that construe the problem as intentional. Elizabeth Bradburn chooses to examine the novel's "system of conceptual metaphors" rather than its "conscious propositions" (877). At the end of the novel, she argues, "The material and social body has successfully smothered Diana's progressive intellectual ideals in the sleep of domesticity" (893). Bradburn locates meaning in the network of metaphors through which the novel models mind and the body: she is, therefore, not interested in the narrator's (or Meredith's) opinion of Diana's smothering, and her reading does not struggle against a textual coercion to see the marriage as a happy ending. Neil Roberts, decentring narrative authority through Bakhtinian theory, writes, "There is no reason . . . to suppose that we are to interpret the phrase 'loss of self in the man' as a final achievement of true femininity, or as anything but a highly problematic condition of Diana's sexual fulfilment" (224). Instead of assuming the narrator's judgments to be authorized, Roberts reveals a "hidden polemic" that he assumes to be intended: in other words, what has authorial approval for Roberts is not Diana's marriage but the provocation that it offers to a reader encouraged elsewhere in the novel to consider the value of Diana's independence (224). (McGlamery's approach is ostensibly also Bakhtinian, but she curiously monologizes the dialogue of the novel by arguing that it makes an appreciation for dialogue into a desirable character trait. If Meredith offers Redworth as Diana's "proper mate" because Redworth values free dialogue, then the novel does not, itself, value dialogue very much [485].) Such alternative methods of reading differentiate between the

intentions of a realist narrator and the design of the text as the readers construe it. This difference can turn the ethical problems raised by a text into meaningful parts of the text's form.

When the narrator is considered to be the ultimate authority of a novel, on the other hand, our rejection of the narrator's claims often entails a larger rejection of the novel's structure of values, and sometimes even its coherence as an artistic form, since values are part of the artistic form of a realist novel. Beer, reading another crux in *Diana*, moves from faulting the narrator's judgment to faulting the novel. At one point in the heart of the narrative, Diana betrays her sometime lover Dacier. Diana is trying to write her own novel, but is suffering from writer's block and can only produce a "heavy bit of moralized manufacture" for the first sentence, when really "Her present mood was a craving for excitement; for incident, wild action, the primitive machinery of our species; any amount of theatrical heroics, pathos, and clown-gabble" (Meredith, *Diana* 360). She cries, "It has come to this—I have no head" (360). The block is doubly troubling to her because she writes professionally and is living outside her means: she thinks not only of her book, but also of her "bank-book" (360). Dacier, a member of parliament, interrupts her with his entrance, and shares with her a political secret known only to him and the prime minister.¹ He then kindles, takes her hands, and, it is implied, kisses her. Diana, still married at this point to her estranged first husband, turns Dacier away and sells his secret to a newspaper editor. Her motives, as far as they are visible to us, are complex and overdetermined: they involve anxiety about authorship, authority, money, public perception, her vexed erotic relationship with Dacier, and perhaps even that "craving for excitement; incident, wild action" that interferes with her writing.

¹ Meredith is vague about historical landmarks in *Diana of the Crossways*, and the conversation between Diana and Dacier does not explicitly reveal what the secret is. To the extent, however, that *Diana* is loosely based on the story of Caroline Norton, the secret is Robert Peel's intent to repeal the Corn Laws in 1845. When the *Times* published Peel's intent ahead of his announcement of it, rumour had it that Norton was responsible because of her connection to Sidney Herbert. For the links between *Diana* and Norton's life, see Argyle.

Beer's objection to the betrayal centres on what she terms its "artistic problem," namely the "artistic problem of the relationship of author to heroine" (163). Beer believes that Meredith has become too attached to Diana: he displays a "lack of affection for Dacier and [a] possessiveness towards his heroine"; "He is obliged to blacken Dacier in order to excuse Diana"; he "feels [a] pressure to protect his heroine from criticism" (159, 163, 165). It is as if Meredith himself has fallen in love with Diana. Although Beer's argument also pertains to plot and characterization, especially Meredith's decisions to interrupt Diana's elopement with Dacier and to reduce Dacier to a caricature after Diana betrays him, Beer objects most forcefully to the narrative commentary. On the plus side "Meredith *shows* much that is original and daring about emotional stress and suggests new attitudes to the concept of 'congruity' of character in fiction" (159, author's emphasis). But "Meredith cannot bear to allow any loss of sympathy for her [Diana]. This involves him in turgid and otiose *explanations* of what has been presented through image and action" (159, author's emphasis). Beer's opposition between showing and explaining recalls the modernist preference for showing over telling, which ignores, as Booth and Tristram Shandy have both reminded us, that all narration is telling. Though there is a lot of the intrusive kind of telling in *Diana* and in Meredith generally, Beer rejects what she is being told, considers it inaccurate, and this inaccuracy becomes for her an artistic flaw in the novel. She writes, "The artistic problem arises *not* because Diana's actions are 'incongruous' but because the novelist's commentary exculpates her even while Diana feels herself to blame" (160, author's emphasis).

The narrator does tell us what to think about Diana's betrayal of Dacier in commentary like the following: "When we are losing balance on a precipice we do not think much of the thing we have clutched for support. Our balance is restored and we have not fallen; that is the comfortable reflection: we stand as others do, and we will for the future be warned to avoid the

dizzy stations which cry for resources beyond a common equilibrium, and where a slip precipitates us to ruin” (Meredith, *Diana* 382). One might feel with Beer that such commentary is special pleading disguised as generalization. If we accept the narrator’s proposition about “us,” humans in general, then it follows that we must see Diana’s actions in a certain way: she was desperate, she wasn’t thinking of the consequences, the chance was too good to pass up, anyone would have done the same, she won’t do it again. Apologies like these are entailed by what the narrator claims as a universal truth, but they are not adequate to Diana’s complex motives, darkly intimated in dialogue and focalized narration (“shown,” that is, not “explained”). Besides—the thing Diana clutches for support, the selling of her lover’s secret, has everything to do with her “precipice,” the brink of financial ruin, sexual transgression, and submission to a man. It is no wonder that Beer considers the narration to be apologetic. Her ability, as a keen reader, to reject this apology is of the utmost importance. Of course we ought to be able to reject a narrator’s judgments, and especially the values and ideologies implied by them. The model of the realist narrator as vehicle of authority, however, masks the role of the reader’s dissent in the realist novel as a form. The success of *Diana of the Crossways* as a novel does not depend on the reader’s belief that the narrator is right about Diana, and if we conceive of narrative commentary differently, it becomes possible to see the role that error plays in Meredith’s narration.

3. Meredith’s Gnomes

The narrator’s comment about what we think of when balancing on precipices, like the generalization about Celtic minds, is a gnomic utterance, a short assertion of a speaker’s wisdom. I will call these utterances “gnomes” to avoid promoting any particular kind of gnome, such as the aphorism, the epigram, or the maxim, to a general category term. With “gnome” I allude to

Barthes's "gnomic codes": a subset of the "cultural" or "reference" codes, which invoke knowledge or wisdom from the larger cultural text of which the single text is a part. For Barthes, these reference codes are at the core of what is wrong with the readerly: "The referential codes have a kind of emetic virtue, they bring on nausea by [. . .] boredom, conformism, and disgust with [the] repetition that establishes them"; "If we collect all such knowledge, all such vulgarisms, we create a monster, and this monster is ideology" (*S/Z* 139, 97).² Barthes's problem with these codes is a version of what I termed the problem of disagreeing:

Like didactic language and political language, which also never question the repetition of their utterances (their stereotypic essence), the cultural proverb vexes, provokes an intolerant reading; the Balzacian text is clotted with it: because of its cultural codes, it stales, rots, excludes itself from writing (which is always a *contemporary* task): it is the quintessence, the residual condensate of what cannot be rewritten. (98)

In conceiving the reader as a writer engaged in an act that is "always . . . *contemporary*," Barthes recognizes that the reader is always later than the text, must always to some extent rewrite the text *now*. The difference that permits disagreement is inherent in reading. Because cultural codes are, for Barthes, repetition without critical difference, they resist the reader's critical difference, are an unpleasant "condensate," a sediment, like sand in one's dinner. They make the reader angry and they make the text "stale," unpalatable to the contemporary reader, which is every reader.

² I have emended Richard Miller's translation of Barthes, which reads: "The referential codes have a kind of emetic virtue, they bring on nausea by the boredom, conformism, and disgust with repetition that establishes them." The reference codes are established simply by repetition, not by disgust with repetition; and disgust with repetition, along with conformity and boredom, contribute to the reader's nausea. See Barthes, *Éditions du Seuil*, 1970: "Les codes de référence ont une sorte de vertu vomitive, ils écoeuvent, par l'ennui, le conformisme, le dégoût de la répétition qui les fonde" (145).

Barthes feeds his own “intolerant reading” of cultural codes in *Sarrasine*, however, by a kind of rewriting that is not a necessary part of reading. He uses a “transformational” stylistics, on analogy with transformational grammar, to translate narrative utterances into the form of gnomes in order to expose underlying cultural codes: “it is because an utterance can be transformed into a proverb, a maxim, a postulate, that the supporting cultural code is discoverable” (100). Balzac’s sentence “*gentleness was always the most powerful of weapons where this passionate soul was concerned, and the master had no greater control over his student than when he inspired his gratitude through paternal kindness*” becomes “*A soft answer turneth away wrath*” (99, author’s italics). Transformational stylistics makes cultural codes a hidden dimension of the text that the critic “discover[s]” by expressing the judgments implicit in narration in the form of gnomes. For Barthes, the codes exposed this way are apparently no different from the ones actually expressed in gnomonic form. Gnomes, then, are no more than undisguised cultural codes that need not be translated by the critic-translator. But disregarding the particulars of narration, the specific forms of a narrator’s speech, elides the potential for difference in these particulars. There can be no critical difference in the repetition of cultural codes if our method of reading assimilates all the repetitions. An implied cultural stereotype cannot simply be translated into a gnome without significant loss of meaning, specifically whatever it means in a given context to imply a stereotype instead of expressing it directly as a gnome. I will treat gnomes, then, not as mere vessels for cultural condensate, but as forms that are significant in themselves: speech genres, in Bakhtin’s terminology. This approach will allow us to consider how gnomes are deployed in Meredith’s work not merely to invoke accepted truths but to call into question the wisdom and authority of their speakers, including the narrators themselves.

Meredith is a gnomic writer. His narration and the speech of his characters are peppered with gnomes. He even invents sources for them, secondary texts like “The Pilgrim’s Scrip,” “The Book of Egoism,” or sundry records of Diana Warwick’s witticisms, including her own novels. Meredith deploys his gnomes self-consciously: his narrators and characters are critics of them as well as authors. His novels exemplify gnomic style and examine the potentials and pitfalls of the gnome as a genre of speech. Writing of “the novel’s incorporation of every possible kind of maxim and aphorism,” Bakhtin suggests that these forms of speech “may oscillate between the purely objective (the ‘word on display’) and the directly intentional, that is, the fully conceptualized philosophical dicta of the author himself (unconditional discourse spoken with no qualifications or distancing)” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 322). Meredith’s gnomes occupy a middle ground closer to the first of these poles. When Meredith’s gnomes happen to be concerned explicitly with wisdom and folly, they tend to perform a conventional inversion of these terms. Sir Austin Feverel, the “Aphorist” of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, writes: “Life is a tedious process of learning we are Fools” (Meredith 9).³ Diana claims the following about “Romance” in *Diana of the Crossways*: “*The young who avoid that region escape the title of Fool at the cost of a celestial crown*” (12).⁴ And Professor Crooklyn defines “a rough truth” in *The Egoist* by saying, “It is a rough truth, ma’am, that the world is composed of fools, and that the exceptions are knaves” (304). Sir Austin and Crooklyn’s gnomes imply that folly is a general condition, and all three suggest that embracing this condition is better than the alternative. These statements are not principles that the novels set out to prove, but they accomplish at least two things. First, they posit the basic tenets of wise folly, entertaining the idea that humanity and

³ This aphorism does not appear in the second or third editions of the novel. I quote the first edition, which better illustrates Meredith’s use of the conventional language of wise folly and his interest in the form of the aphorism. For more on Meredith’s revisions of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

⁴ All italics are Meredith’s unless otherwise indicated.

folly are inextricably linked, and that, therefore, wisdom and folly are antithetical but unstable categories, liable to switch places in a hierarchy of value. Second, these gnomes signal the alliance between the discourse of wise folly and the gnome as a speech genre.

Gnomes being expressions of wisdom, they often draw on a set of conventional terms and associations pertaining to “philosophy” in a broad sense, especially ethics. Gnomes, in other words, tend to allude to the history and language of their own genre. Thus does Crooklyn make his claim about the moral condition of humanity through the verbal pairing of the fool and the knave, traditional at least since the Renaissance and deliberately archaic in the mouth of a Victorian pedant. Such allusions are a clue to the conventionality of the wisdom the gnomes express. Sir Austin’s aphorism recalls the paradox of Touchstone’s “The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool,” which Touchstone himself identifies as a “saying,” and which recasts Socrates’s ironic claim to the wisdom of knowing he is not wise (Shakespeare, *As You Like It* 5.1.30-31). Crooklyn’s cynical pronouncement and Diana’s defense of the folly of romance are hardly new ideas, either. These gnomes remind us that it is conventional to express moral truths in pithy sentences using terms like “wisdom,” “folly,” and “knavery,” ethical categories whose exact content is changeable and must be worked out in use, though certain configurations of the terms tend to recur.

It is also conventional for authors and characters to play with the positions of these categories in an ethical hierarchy: this play is wise folly. Confronting Kent in the stocks, the Fool appears to tease him for sticking by Lear, suggesting that Kent is foolish to remain loyal to a man whose power is waning: “Let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill lest it break thy neck with following it; but the great one that goes upward, let him draw thee after” (*King Lear* 2.2.261-63). Yet the Fool immediately retracts his own advice: “When a wise man gives thee

better counsel give me mine again; I would have none but knaves follow it, since a fool gives it” (2.2.264-66). The metaphor of the wheel now has the status of an antinomy, delivered by a fool for the benefit of knaves. The Fool implies that he is actually praising Kent for his service to Lear, and indeed, dropping into rhyme, he expresses his intention to do the same:

But I will tarry, the fool will stay,

And let the wise man fly:

The knave turns fool that runs away,

The fool no knave perdy. (2.2.271-74)

The ethical terms by this point have completely slipped their moorings: it’s wise to run away, but it’s knavish to run away, and isn’t it foolish to choose to be a knave? It’s foolish to stay, but at least one doesn’t succumb to the knavish wisdom of running. Through the Fool’s verbal trickery “folly” and “wisdom” become simultaneously valued and devalued categories, with the Fool choosing his favourite kind of each. After all, everyone’s a fool, but some fools are wiser than others, usually the ones that understand that every course of action is a choice among follies—thus runs the logic of wise folly.⁵ “Where learned you this, fool?” asks Kent (2.2.275). The Fool replies, “Not i’t the stocks, fool” (2.2.276). The Fool’s taunting, in the end, is that of a professional toying with an unaccomplished amateur: he and the disguised Kent are both playing the fool, but the Fool’s not the one in the stocks. Meredith’s allusions to the language of wise folly in *Sir Austen*, *Crooklyn*, and *Diana*’s gnomes invoke not only the history of gnomic utterance in English, but also its often vexed relationship to moral truth. This relationship has

⁵ Cf. Enid Welsford’s reading of this scene in *The Fool*, p. 255. She writes, “This whole passage proved so puzzling to Dr Johnson—whose mind was not attuned to the nuances and complex ironies of fool-literature—that he wished to straighten out the reasoning by emendation, and in particular to alter the last lines of the song into:

‘The fool turns knave who runs away;
The knave no fool perdy’” (255).

Johnson’s version is a much less complex argument for running away: the knave may be a knave, but he isn’t a fool. The unemended version plays on a less stable distinction between the knave and the fool, in which knavery can be another route to folly.

been explored through a tradition of thought and artistic practice to which both Shakespeare and Meredith belong. Having examined the generic context, associations, and possibilities of Meredith's gnomes, we turn now to his specific treatment of them in his fiction.

"Gnome," of course, is my word. Meredith uses a variety of terms. The narrator of *Diana* offers the following general reflections on wit while considering the particular case of Diana's:

When a nation has acknowledged that it is as yet but in the fisticuff stage of the art of condensing our purest sense to golden sentences, a readier appreciation will be extended to the gift: which is to strike not the dazzled eyes, the unanticipating nose, the ribs, the sides, and stun us, twirl us, hoodwink, mystify, tickle and twitch, by dexterities of lingual sparring and shuffling, but to strike roots in the mind, the Hesperides of good things. (Meredith 2)

Diana's "golden sentences," unlike Sir Austin's aphorisms, Captain Kirby's maxims, or Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson's epigrams, are never assigned a specific subgenre. The naming of a gnome in Meredith's novels characterizes not only the specific linguistic features of the utterance but also its dialogic context, including the kind of speaker that speaks it. Sir Austin is a "scientific humanist," stung by his wife's infidelity into misogyny and monomania, who fills his "Pilgrim's Scrip" with general reflections on human nature, especially woman's nature and its dangerous effects on man. Captain Kirby, from *The Amazing Marriage*, is a hyper-masculine swashbuckler, who wooed his wife away from her weak husband and whose "Maxims for men" contains rules for action, specifically for acting like Captain Kirby. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson is the voice of society in *The Egoist* whose epigrams sum up other characters pointedly but enigmatically. Diana, in contrast to these characters, is elusive, situated at the "crossways" of various accounts of her, none of which is entirely accurate. Her gnomes are most like the

aphorisms of Sir Austin, but since the aphorism in Meredith suggests a speaker like Sir Austin, male but emasculated, taking refuge in philosophy, it makes sense that the narrator does not call Diana an aphorist.

Nevertheless, the “art of condensing our purest sense to golden sentences” describes most gnomes in Meredith accurately. First, the gnome contains “our purest sense”; it claims that form of knowledge, different from either empirical fact or tautological truth, which I have been classifying as wisdom. The “our” is significant because it marks this “purest sense” as collective: the narrator’s wording suggests not only good sense but *common* sense, the wisdom of consensus. The “Book of Egoism,” the imaginary record of human nature to which Meredith refers throughout *The Egoist* is, he tells us, “a book full of the world’s wisdom” (3). That wisdom often takes the form of gnomes that the narrator quotes from the Book. In fact, gnomes in Meredith are so often quoted, so often the words of someone else, even an imaginary human collective, that one might say the form of the gnome is constitutively quotational. Gary Saul Morson, accordingly, classes aphorisms, maxims, and witticisms in the genre category of “quotations.” Gnomes travel through text in what Bakhtin calls “intonational quotation marks”: they are spoken by speakers, but suggest a different original speaker, one who remains theoretical and unidentifiable (*The Dialogic Imagination* 44).

Under this view of the gnome, its speaker speaks for many and speaks words that have already been spoken. The wisdom of the realist narrator, expressed in gnomonic form, could be freighted not with an individual authority but a social one, which recalls J. Hillis Miller’s conception of the narrator as a collective consciousness or Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth’s conception of the narrator as “Nobody,” an indicator of potential consensus (Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction* 53-90; Ermarth 65-93). Not merely a channel for the cultural codes, the narrator may be

the *repository* of them. Yet in Meredith the gnome, “our purest sense,” is also an “art” that takes the form of “golden sentences.” “Golden” here suggests beauty, specifically a wrought beauty: gnomes as gilt work. One of the expectations built into this speech genre is that it will be evaluated aesthetically. As Jonathan Loesberg has argued in *A Return to Aesthetics*, to apprehend an object aesthetically is to treat it as if it were designed, whether or not we’re willing to commit to the real existence of the design or even the designer. Gnomes seem like quotations of collective wisdom, but they are also intentional forms that must be treated as authored in order to be read and assessed. And they are also in fact authored, on one level by Meredith’s characters and narrators, on another by Meredith, who kept notebooks of them to use in his novels, Sir Austin being loosely based on himself.⁶ Meredith emphasizes, especially in *Diana of the Crossways*, the work involved in authoring gnomes. The narrator of *Diana*, an exacting critic of golden sentences, makes it an implicit criterion of a good gnome that it maintain a right balance between the appearance of collective wisdom (“our purest sense”) and a singular beauty. A gnome in Meredith must not be idiosyncratic, but it must not be a cliché.

Thus, the narrator judges one of Diana’s aphorisms to be simply a comment on her position as an object of scandal: “Her saying that ‘A woman in the pillory restores the original bark of brotherhood to mankind,’ is no more than a cry of personal anguish” (*Diana* 12). This one is “no more than . . . personal” because it seems too rooted in Diana’s own predicament. On the other hand, the narrator judges another to be unoriginal: “It is there [in being creatures of habit] we see ourselves crutched between love grown old and indifference ageing to love” (10). The narrator hears in this gnome “an echo of maxims and aphorisms overchannel, notwithstanding a feminine thrill in the irony of ‘ageing to love’” (10). It is too continental, not to mention too feminine. Perhaps, then, one might speak collective wisdom in an original way by

⁶ See Beer, 19-20, for Meredith’s use of his notebook aphorisms in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*.

splitting up form and content, expressing an old idea in a novel phrase? Apparently not: the next aphorism, “*Men may have rounded Seraglio Point: they have not yet doubled Cape Turk,*” is “fresher . . . though we find it to be but the clever literary clothing of a common accusation” (10). What oft was thought but ne’er so well express’d apparently does not suffice.

There may be no satisfying this narrator, and fortunately we are not concerned here with deciding what makes a good gnome. The narrator’s criticism of Diana’s phrases is important because, first, it suggests the dual quality of the gnomic writer’s voice, the tendency towards individual craft on the one hand and a collective consciousness on the other. Second, the narrator’s criticism suggests that it may be impossible perfectly to reconcile the two halves of this voice. The narrator communicates this impossibility partly by being fallible himself in particular ways, which is difficult to recognize if he is taken to represent a collective rather than a singular perspective. There are strong signs that he is male, and his position with respect to Diana colours his treatment of her. He carefully avoids taking a side in the first paragraph of the novel, which describes a gnomic war of the sexes in which “a general fling at the [female] sex” will be returned in time by “a strange assault of wanton missiles”: here he refers to both men and women as “them” (1). But his androgyny seems more likely to be a pose, that of a male philosopher attempting but failing to be impartial in his survey of human nature. His complaint about a “feminine thrill in the irony of ‘ageing to love’” leaves little doubt that he, at the very least, does not identify with the feminine. The aphorism about women in the pillory features woman as scapegoat; the one about Cape Turk suggests, via some Orientalism, that men have not yet discovered how to treat women as equals. These are feminist aphorisms, and in singling them out for critique, the narrator appears not to be motivated by purely aesthetic criteria. The masculine authorial persona treats Diana’s rival authorship with condescension.

The biased narrator alleges, however, that Diana herself is skeptical of her feminist sentences: “Generally in her character of the feminine combatant there is a turn of phrase, like a dimple near the lips, showing her knowledge that she was uttering but a tart measure of the truth. She had always too much lambent humour to be the dupe of the passion wherewith, as she says, ‘we lash ourselves into the persuasive speech distinguishing us from the animals’” (14). On the one hand, the narrator gets to undermine Diana’s feminist gnomes here; on the other hand, he does quote Diana expressing doubt about gnomes—in a gnome. Diana’s witty characterization of “persuasive speech” gives humans a wise-foolish status, at both an advantage and a disadvantage to the animals. As if in illustration of the gnome’s sense, Diana deploys the paradox of wise folly, making a claim that undermines the grounds of its own wisdom: if persuasive speech is the result of being duped by one’s passions, then what is the status of Diana’s own persuasive speech when she says that this is so? The solution to this paradox is a wise-foolish mask, an attitude of “lambent humour” towards one’s own assertions, including assertions of wise folly.

What the narrator says about Diana, however, applies equally to him, is the most accurate way to characterize the self-conscious tone in which he delivers even his sexist judgments. The narrator, too, is full of “lambent humour” and knows he utters “but a tart measure of the truth.” Only thus can he spend an entire chapter scrupulously analyzing references to Diana and quotations from her, musing on the topics of philosophy, realism, and fiction, only to close (playfully, self-deprecatingly, obnoxiously) with “Wherewith let us to our story, the froth being out of the bottle” (20). This self-deprecation suggests neither the authority of a god-like narrator, speaking from his enlightened place, nor the neutral transmission of collective wisdom, but a wry, very human awareness of one’s own fallibility, with a determination to persist in it. The narrator of the *Egoist* begins his narrative with a similarly discursive preamble on comedy, in a

chapter whose title similarly disavows the value of its content: “A Chapter of Which the Last Page Only Is of Any Importance.” Meredith’s narrators tend to be aware of the folly of “the persuasive speech distinguishing us from animals.” And yet Meredith’s narrators and many of his characters are inveterate phrase-makers. This ambivalence is inseparable from the aspects of gnomic speech that we have seen. The speaker of a gnome is poised in an impossible negotiation between two identities, as singular author and as conduit of culturally-available wisdom, and may therefore turn the position into that of the wise fool, who might speak eccentric nonsense or might speak common sense but who always speaks provisionally, imagining that wisdom cannot be systematically distinguished from folly. Meredith’s narrators navigate this course.

There is yet another reason for Meredith’s ambivalent treatment of gnomes, and it is another defining characteristic of gnomic speech. The making of golden sentences is, we recall, “The art of *condensing* our purest sense.” That condensation entails several things. Pith, for one: the art of counting and weighing words. Gnomes, after all, must be relatively short to be quotable. “Life is a tedious process of learning we are Fools,” however, is not an exemplar of classical economy. The “art of condensing” is more than just mastery of syntax and diction. It is also a process of induction, of flying from particulars to the general. What makes this process an art is largely that it is not a science: the induction is wilfully inadequate, an imaginative reach. Induction, of course, is always an inadequate route to general truth, but in gnomic speech, unlike scientific practice, the path taken remains obscure and unsystematic. Insofar as the gnomic speaker expresses common wisdom, that wisdom has no origin, is, as Barthes terms it, a cultural “condensate.” Insofar as the gnomic speaker authors the utterance, what we admire is his or her daring leap towards truth. Our very awareness of this leap is what allows us to credit the speaker with a special wisdom, based on wit, keen intuition, genius, experience, or, in Culler’s words,

“judicious rumination” (31). A gnome, in other words, is neither self-evident nor a mere summary of available data. It is the product of a mind engaged either in processing and compressing shared experience into a single statement or shaping personal insight into a statement that *looks* like it expresses shared experience. Because we are given the result of the reasoning, not the recipe for it, the narrator has the character of an authority. But, also for this reason, gnomes are especially susceptible to the listener or reader’s disagreement, and this possibility of dissent is a characteristic of the gnome as a genre of speech, a result of its compression and its self-contradictory form.⁷

Gnomic compression can also be semantic supersaturation, an excess of potential meaning. Gnomes often have the character of mysteries or puzzles that yield up their significance only under interpretation, and even then do not, perhaps, yield fully. This last form of compression is hyperbolically visible in an epigram from *The Egoist*. A provisional distinction: compared to the aphorism and the maxim, the epigram accentuates stylistic brilliance over philosophical profundity or moral engagement, is more clearly a *bon mot* uttered to dazzle. Mrs. Mountstuart’s epigrams are not ambitious in their compression of general truths into particular images: she does not attempt to convey wisdom about human nature or the world, merely about individual character, which she captures in striking images. The more aphoristic narrator is somewhat disdainful of her epigrammatic wit: she is “a lady certain to say the remembered, if not the right thing” (Meredith, *The Egoist* 10). There is, once again, a tension of gender in the narrator’s treatment of Mrs. Mountstuart in *The Egoist*, just as there is in the

⁷ Philip E. Lewis, studying the form of the maxim in La Rochefoucauld’s *Maximes*, describes an instability similar to the one I am identifying in Meredith’s gnomes: “insofar as the ‘absolute’ truth of the maxim lies within a domain which remains unspecified, the truth of the maxim is itself insecure. In other words, reading the maxim involves a kind of confrontation between the absolute and the relative in which each threatens the other, in which each version of the truth appears in its problematical aspect. However convincing, however telling, the maxim’s truth still becomes the reader’s problem. The phenomenon in question is designated by Barthes as part of the paradox of the maxim: its generality achieves the most intimate questioning that literature can incite in its reader” (21).

narrator's treatment of Diana in *Diana of the Crossways*. (Such tensions are more fully dramatized and explored in *The Amazing Marriage*, where the typical masculine Meredithian narrator wrests control of the narrative and its imaginary source documents from Dame Gossip, a feminized alternate narrator with an entirely different style.) Still, *The Egoist's* narrator's judgment of Mrs. Mountstuart doesn't prevent him from spending several pages on a close reading of one of her epigrams.

The set piece is Meredith at his contrapuntal best. Mrs. Mountstuart remarks of Sir Willoughby, "*You see he has a leg*" (11). The epigram circulates around the party gathered for Sir Willoughby's coming of age: "In seeming to say infinitely less than others, as Miss Isabel Patterne pointed out to Lady Busshe, Mrs. Mountstuart comprised all that the others had said, by showing the needlessness of allusions to the saliently evident" (11). This appearance of having the last word, however, is only an appearance, an illusion of closure, which in fact spurs the other characters to exegeses. The narrator evaluates their attempts to unpack the epigram (Lady Culmer's is "prosaic"), and provides his own "amplifi[cation]" (11). He tries out different possible accentuations: "You *see* it: or, you see *he* has it. Miss Isabel and Miss Eleanor disputed the incidence of the emphasis, but surely, though a slight difference of meaning may be heard, either will do: many, with a good show of reason, throw the accent upon *leg*" (12). Over the course of several paragraphs the narration oscillates between the narrator's explanations of the epigram and his synopses of various women's explanations of the epigram—again, the narration suggests a man making light of women's speech. The epigram turns out to suggest, among other things, gentlemanly accomplishments and an anachronistic chivalry that recalls the elegance of the court of Charles I without the licentiousness, the best of two worlds. It is a "poetic leg," "a leg with brains in it, soul": "He has it as Cicero had a tongue" (13).

The narrator concludes several pages of such interpretations with a summary of the epigram's accomplishment: "For the young Sir Willoughby's family and his thoughtful admirers, it is not too much to say that Mrs. Mountstuart's little word fetched an epoch of our history to colour the evening of his arrival at man's estate" (13). (The phrase "arrival at man's estate" incidentally but suggestively echoes Feste's enigmatic final song from *Twelfth Night*, which seems to tell a rogue's progress more than a gentleman's: "But when that I came to man's estate / With hey, ho, the wind and the rain, / 'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate" [5.1.383-85].) After this statement the narrator undertakes his first direct characterization of Willoughby, describing his education and his accomplishments. The description is orthodox at this point, no longer organized by the readings of the epigram, and we are allowed almost to forget that the description was provoked by the epigram, until the narrative abruptly resumes: "Hearing of Mrs. Mountstuart's word on him, he smiled and said: 'It is at her service'" (14). The call and the response, the *bon mot* and the genteel acknowledgement of it, book-end our introduction to Willoughby's character: the antecedent of Willoughby's "it," the leg, seems in retrospect as if it has been looming over the whole intervening section, even the portion not explicitly concerned with the epigram. Although the characterization of Sir Willoughby contains details we never could have gleaned from "he has a leg" without the assistance of the narrator and the other characters, this characterization is presented as if it were entirely consistent with and motivated by Mrs. Mountstuart's summation of Willoughby. The section is a parody of interpretation and a satire of a social discourse that is specifically represented as feminine, but with typical wise-foolish ambivalence Meredith actually uses the section as his first extended characterization of the Egoist.

Mrs. Mountstuart's epigram exemplifies how gnomes, though they appear to close dialogue, require an ongoing interpretation that in fact catalyzes dialogue. Gnomes convey their compression partly by implying a rich, perhaps limitless potential for elaboration. As a result, even though the gnome as an utterance has clear boundaries, either actual or imaginary quotation marks, it exerts a wide influence over the surrounding narration. Sir Austin's "Life is a tedious process of learning we are fools" is accompanied, "by way of comment," by a supplement: "When we know ourselves Fools, we are already something better" (*Feverel* 9). Sometimes the supplementary comment maintains the gnomic tone but belongs to another speaker. Here is *Diana's* narrator: "But she would have us away with sentimentalism. Sentimental people, in her phrase, '*fiddle harmonics on the strings of sensualism*,' to the delight of a world gaping for marvels of musical execution rather than for music. For our world is all but a sensational world at present, in maternal travail of a soberer, a braver, a brighter-eyed. Her reflections are thus to be interpreted, it seems to me" (12). The narrator moves from a direct quotation of a gnome to a commentary that he labels an "interpret[ation]" but that is gnomic in its own right. Double-voiced, this second gnome is presented sympathetically with Diana's, but has the distinct stamp of the narrator's progressive philosophy as it is expounded later in the chapter. The narrator is agreeing with Diana, but translating her view of the world into his own discourse. Even when a gnome and the surrounding narration are both in the narrator's voice, the gnome informs the narration: the narrative becomes evidence for the gnome, or the gnome becomes an explanation of the narrative. Just as characters have zones in which we sense the language and perspective of the characters even when they are not speaking directly, gnomes, too, have zones.⁸

⁸ The concept of the character zone is Bakhtin's: "a character zone is the field of action for a character's voice, encroaching in one way or another upon the author's voice" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 316).

Just as character zones make us aware of different perspectives, gnomonic zones make us aware of the various general frameworks and systems of beliefs through which humans attempt to account for particular phenomena. Meredith's gnomonic style is the management of these zones, the periodic movement of his narration between gnomonic compression and narrative elaboration, a movement which is characteristic not only of Meredith's fiction but of the British realist novel. This movement can generate general claims and judgments that are tendentious, unconvincing, or just plain wrong, but that possibility of failure is not a failure of Meredith's wisdom; rather, it is integral to his art. In Meredith's fiction the relationship of gnome to narrative is not simply that of general law to particular illustration. Meredith does not warrant that a gnome can adequately explain a narrative or that a narrative can exhaustively and accurately interpret a gnome. If one assumes such a guarantee one may be dissatisfied with realist narration. Perhaps one will turn away altogether from the gnomonic style of the nineteenth century, imagining that modernism and postmodernism have rendered such a style defunct. Or, perhaps, one will search for narrators who share one's perspective or who can convince one to share theirs—narrators whose wisdom actually seems to be wisdom. Chapter Three will examine such narration in George Eliot's novels. Eliot's narrators, similarly gnomonic but lacking much of the "lambent humour" of Meredith's, seem more earnestly committed to their philosophies, particularly the doctrine of sympathy, and less susceptible to being read as wise fools. In order to see how Eliot's novels welcome readers' dissent, it will be necessary to consider not only the instability within Eliot's narrative authority but also how the dissenting discourses of marginal characters operate on the ethical hierarchies that the narrators seek to enforce.

Meredith's gnomonic style, combined with his understanding of the gnome as a genre, results in self-conscious narrative judgments that are always suspect—not worthless, not simply

ironic, but of mixed value to our understanding of the characters' reality and our own. By suggesting that these ambivalent narrative judgments are an instrument, perhaps even the primary instrument, of Meredith's realism, I imply a particular model of realism. The following section will examine how Meredith's theories and practices of realism reflect and inform the ambivalent narrative authority he creates through gnomic style.

4. Realism, Comedy, and Philosophy

I have argued that Meredith's use of the gnome is important to the ambivalent narrative authority he constructs because of the movements of gnomic style. Gnomes are not merely isolated remarks, but are in dialogue with the rest of the narrative discourse in which they occur. The gnome is also important because its relationship to the implied life of the characters mimics the relationship of realist fiction to an implied life outside it, to reality. For Meredith, that is, the realist novel as a genre shares certain defining aims with the gnome as a speech genre. The realist novel is the product of an individual artistic vision—life in Meredith's representations looks quite different from life in Eliot's—yet the realist novel also has a social dimension, so that it cannot be a merely eccentric flight of fancy, but must imply, albeit illusorily, a reality shared between the characters and the narrator, and extended to the reader. The realist novel is a condensed representation of this reality, condensed, like the gnome, through abstraction and the mediations of consciousness and language.

Meredith suggests such a view of realism only indirectly. His narrators are literary theorists, but their literary-theoretical statements are part of the gnomic style, and cannot be taken at face value. The prefatory remarks in novels such as *Diana* and *The Egoist* are not exactly congruent with each other or with Meredith's criticism elsewhere. Yet it is possible to

identify certain relationships between Meredith's key terms that clarify what, for him, constitutes the aims of a desirable realism. Meredith himself usually uses the terms "realistic" and "realist" disparagingly: he treats what he calls realism as an unhealthy fad. In *The Egoist* the "realistic method" is "a conscientious transcription of all the visible, and a repetition of all the audible," which "is mainly accountable for our present branfulness, and that prolongation of the vasty and the noisy, out of which, as from an undrained fen, steams the malady of sameness, our modern malady" (4). At least, so says an anonymous "humourist," whom the narrator of the *Egoist* interprets and paraphrases. The problem with realism appears to be a lack of artistic mediation—there are no principles of selection or form, and the result is a constipation that recalls the boredom-induced nausea in *S/Z*, though it is provoked by a sludge of particulars instead of a condensate of trite generalizations.

More specifically, the kind of mediation that realism lacks appears to be decorum, a delicate reluctance to represent what is gritty, vulgar, immoral, lower-class, or grossly material. Thus can the narrator of *The Egoist* declare, "Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals with human nature in the drawing-room of civilized men and women, where we have no dust of the struggling outer world, no mire, no violent crashes, to make the correctness of the representation convincing" (3). The implicit other of comedy is realism, which, the narrator suggests, passes off the vulgar as "correctness of . . . representation." In *Diana*, such realism is denoted by the epithet "dirty drab." In *Celt and Saxon*, the narrator associates this kind of realism with "Mr. [John] Bull," the personification of England: "Bull's notion" of realism is "the realism of the butcher's shop and the pendent legs of mutton and blocks of beef painted raw and glaring in their streaks" (218). Curiously, the mutton and beef are "painted raw," which troubles the metaphor of the butcher's shop. Are we to imagine a butcher's

shop in which a red, fleshy texture is painted onto cuts of meat that otherwise would look different? Or is the idea that, in some representation of the butcher's shop, the meat is painted in all its rawness? Of course, Meredith's narrator is not really complaining about raw meat: these legs and blocks are men and women, and the indecency of realism is in representing them unadorned and flayed, whether or not they are in fact. If humans are vulgar, then the error is in showing them to be so. Meredith writes in the "Essay on Comedy," "it is unwholesome for men and women to see themselves as they are, if they are no better than they should be; and they will not, when they have improved in manners, care much to see themselves as they once were. That comes of realism in the comic art; and it is not public caprice, but the consequence of a bettering state. The same of an immoral may be said . . . of realistic exhibitions of a vulgar society" (84). The deeper problem, however, appears to arise if people are better than realism would have them be—if the rawness is painted on. In *Diana* Emma Dunstane contemplates a "realistic picture" of Thomas Redworth, transformed into the hero of Diana's novel *The Cantatrice*, and the realism appears to be entirely an effect of distortion:

She [Emma] could not so easily forgive the realistic picture of the man: an exaggeration, she thought, of small foibles, that even if they existed, should not have been stressed. The turn for 'calculating' was shown up ridiculously; Mr. Cuthbert Dering was calculating in his impassioned moods as well as in his cold. His head was a long division of ciphers. He had statistics for spectacles, and beheld the world through them, and the mistress he worshipped. (271)

Realism, then, can actually consist not just in recording details excessively or failing to be decorous, but deliberately presenting a cynical vision of life when cynicism is unwarranted. Realism can be caricature in a certain mood.

Meredith's fiction does seem to admit the possibility of a better vision of life. This vision is not that of sentimentalism, which *Diana*'s narrator dubs the "rose-pink," or the "sham decent," and which "is rebuked by hideous revelations of the filthy foul; for nature will force her way, and if you try to stifle her by drowning, she comes up, not the fairest part of her uppermost!" (16). Here, exasperatingly, Meredith suggests that sentimentalism is false for trying to hide what he condemns realism for exposing.⁹ The *Diana* narrator seems to imagine an impossible middle ground in his criticism of literary representation, just as he does when contemplating Diana's gnomes. Yet this middle ground is clearly described: "Philosophy is the foe of both [rose-pink and dirty drab], and their silly cancelling contest, perpetually renewed in a shuffle of extremes, as it always is where a phantasm falseness reigns, will [when philosophy is attained] no longer baffle the contemplation of natural flesh, smother no longer the soul issuing out of our incessant strife" (15). The *via media* is philosophy, an ambiguous word in Meredith, but one that is linked both to intellectual exercise and to literary realism: "a single flight of brains will reach and embrace her [Philosophy]; give you the savour of Truth, the right use of the senses, Reality's infinite sweetness; for these things are in philosophy; and the fiction which is the summary of actual Life, the within and without of us, is, prose or verse, plodding or soaring, philosophy's elect handmaiden" (17). In *Celt and Saxon*, in opposition to "the realism of the butcher's shop," the narrator names a "realism of the active brain and heart conjoined" (218). There is such a thing in Meredith as a good realism, and it is the realism of philosophy.

⁹ Diana and Sir Austin participate gnomically in the rebuking of sentimentalism. Diana's narrator: "she would have us away with sentimentalism. Sentimental people, in her phrase, 'fiddle harmonics on the strings of sensualism,' to the delight of a world gaping for marvels of musical execution rather than for music" (Meredith, *Diana* 12). Sir Austin's: "'Sentimentalists,' says the PILGRIM'S SCRIP, 'are they who seek to enjoy Reality, without incurring the Immense Debtorship for a thing done'" (*Feverel* 226). See Wilt, Chapter Four, for further analysis of Meredith's treatment of sentimentalism.

The narrator of *Diana* attributes the flaws of English fiction, both sentimental and raw-realistic, to lack of philosophy, and he looks forward to a utopian moment when philosophy will be universally embraced. “Philosophy” needs some glossing, since Meredith uses it in special senses that he never defines. Wilt identifies three “activities of mind” that Meredith designates by the word: “First, philosophy is simply self-mastery, the treatment of fevers, the control of appetite. . . . Second, philosophy is simply an educated understanding, a widely broadened appreciation of complexity, mystery, and diversity. . . . Thirdly and pre-eminently for Meredith, philosophy is the active integrator of powers inside and outside the person, the integrator of temperament with circumstance, the agent of man’s wholeness, oneness, with nature” (83). Philosophy in Meredith can also be a power to endure, which looks like an extension of Wilt’s first definition, but actually has more to do with the third. To have philosophy in Meredith is to find a sustainable middle ground from which folly, vice, ugliness, and materiality can be perceived, measured, and reconciled with their opposites: “Philosophy bids us to see that we are not so pretty as rose-pink, not so repulsive as dirty drab; and that instead of everlastingly shifting those barren aspects, the sight of ourselves is wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight” (Meredith, *Diana* 15). The representation of this sight is the “realism of the active brain and heart conjoined.”

Meredith’s emphasis on the role of intellect in this kind of realism recalls the definition of a good gnome in *Diana*, which “strike[s] roots in the mind, the Hesperides of good things.” The “flight of brains” that attains “Reality’s infinite sweetness” is much like the gnomonic one, and we will see that it is fraught with the same problems as gnomonic generalization. It will be necessary, however, to approach these problems by way of a third term: comedy, which like Meredith’s realism is a form concerned with intellect (Meredith calls it “humor of the mind”),

and is likewise a way to compress and record life (*Essay on Comedy* 141). The narrator of *The Egoist* is a proponent of comedy more than realism, and he considers comedy to be the best means of compressing the “Book of Egoism,” that exhaustive imaginary record of human folly. Comedy seems opposed to realism in some ways: “The Comic Spirit conceives a definite situation for a number of characters, and rejects all accessories in the exclusive pursuit of them and their speech. For, being a spirit, he hunts the spirit in men; vision and ardour constitute his merit: he has not a thought of persuading you to believe in him” (*The Egoist* 3). Yet comedy is “the key of the great Book” (5): comedy is the “particular practice of Art in letters [that] is the best for the perusal of the Book of our common wisdom,” and the Comic Spirit is “the spirit born of our united social intelligence” (4). Meredith’s comic and realist compressions of social and individual life are intimately related, and his fanciful comic machinery, including personified abstractions like the Comic Spirit, the Comic Muse, and a horde of imps, are also mechanisms of his realism.

In the *Essay on Comedy* Meredith imagines the Comic Spirit as a celestial visage overlooking English society: “It has the sage’s brows, and the sunny malice of a faun lurks at the corners of the half-closed lips drawn in an idle wariness of half-tension” (141). The Comic Spirit, “humanely malign,” will launch “volleys of silvery laughter” at those who “violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another” (142). Though Meredith treats the Comic Spirit as a god, this god is clearly not meant to have real, autonomous existence: the Comic Spirit is a condensation and projection of a social contract and of shared human experience into a fictional character on a divine plane. Meredith is responsible for describing and naming the character, but he means it as a way to visualize a cultural experience that he considers to be really shared: “to feel its [the Spirit’s] presence, and to see it, is your

assurance that many sane and solid minds are with you in what you are experiencing” (143). The Comic Spirit, like the gnome, is meant to represent the vision of others even though Meredith puts great effort into imagining it himself.¹⁰

In contrast to comedy, Meredith’s term “humour” designates an artistic mode that is far less concerned with what the sane and solid minds of others are experiencing. Cervantes and Sterne are exemplary humourists: “The humorist of high [order] has an embrace of contrasts beyond the scope of the comic poet” (136); “The stroke of the great humorist is world-wide, with lights of tragedy in his laughter” (137); “If you laugh all round him [a ridiculous person], tumble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you, and yours to your neighbor, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is a spirit of Humor that is moving you” (134). The allusion in that last definition, both in content and style, is to Sterne. A similar language appears in the passage from *Diana* that describes the gift of gnomonic utterance. A gnome should “strike not the dazzled eyes, the unanticipating nose, the ribs, the sides, and stun us, twirl us, hoodwink, mystify, tickle and twitch, by dexterities of lingual sparring and shuffling” (2). We can hear Sterne here, too. Humourists “touching upon history or society are given to be capricious. They are, as in the case of Sterne, given to be sentimental,” and for Meredith the sham of sentiment is the opponent of authentic realism and philosophy (*Essay on Comedy* 138). Comedy, on the other hand, is for Meredith fully intellectual and social, not sentimental and idiosyncratic as humour is apt to be: it is “an interpretation of the general mind, and is for that reason of necessity kept in restraint” (138). In other words, humour is a product of the humourist’s singular vision. Tristram Shandy and Thackeray’s narrator both offer humorous visions of life, the difference being that Thackeray suggests a reality outside that

¹⁰ In his discussion of the realist narrator as a collective mind, Miller claims that the narrator of *The Egoist* “is the comic spirit” (*The Form of Victorian Fiction* 79). I am suggesting that, in Meredith’s novels, the narrators are the ones who imagine the comic spirit and other symbols of collective consciousness, and are not identical with them.

vision. Meredith, who considers Thackeray a comedian and admires him, further develops both the social and individual aspects of comic representation.

Meredith's fiction is not always comic. Yet the aim of "interpreting the general mind" is implicit in his gnomic utterances and in his practice of realism. The one interprets the many, presenting individual wisdom that has the appearance of collective wisdom, though it may not be in fact, and presenting individual perceptions that have the appearance of collective perception, though they may not be in fact. My view of realism in Meredith differs from Ermarth's model of realism, in which the narrator is "Nobody," responsible primarily for establishing the world of the fiction as realistic by communicating the possibility of consensus about it, and thereby its persistence in time and space. Although Meredith's narrator does perform this function, implying a world of objects with spatial and temporal persistence, the implied realistic world is at one remove from the representation; the primary object of representation in a novel by Meredith is the narrator's interpretation or vision of the realistic world, a vision that balances singular imagination with the evocation of shared experience. This remove is characteristic of nineteenth-century British realism. The British realist novel represents narrators' attempts to understand a world taken to be real, including the psychological reality of individual characters and the social reality of the interactions between them. Yet the results of those attempts to understand are inconclusive, because a narrator is only one mind, like each of the characters, not a true collective that is identical with the "general mind" or a god who can illuminate whatever remains dark to the characters. As long as Diana's marriage to Redworth is understood to be a realistic event, then there is no final authority in the novel who can decide if the marriage is good or bad.

The critique of accepted wisdom in Meredith's novels proceeds not through direct statements of some alternative wisdom but through the dialogue into which Meredith's narration

thrusts standards of wisdom. In *Diana of the Crossways* the narrator proposes philosophy as a corrective to romanticized ideals of femininity:

You have to teach your imagination of the feminine image you have set up to bend your civilized knees to, that it must temper its fastidiousness, shun the grossness of the overdainty. Or, to speak in the philosophic tongue, you must turn on *yourself*, resolutely track and seize that burrower, and scrub and cleanse him; by which process, during the course of it, you will arrive at the conception of the right heroical woman for *you* to worship: and if you prove to be of some spiritual stature, you may reach to an ideal of the heroical feminine type for the worship of mankind, an image as yet in poetic outline only, on our upper skies. (19)

One may well have misgivings about the value of seeking “an ideal of the heroical feminine for the worship of mankind,” but philosophy in Meredith is wise and foolish, always liable to reproduce the imbalances it seeks to correct. The self-corrective, Socratic turn—“you must turn on *yourself*”—is the crucial realist move, and it is enacted repeatedly in Meredith. In *Diana of the Crossways*, Meredith places concepts of femininity at the crossways, subjects them not to final correction but to a process of perpetual correction that he cannot accomplish alone. Error, especially the narrator’s error, is essential to this process. Wilt sees Meredith’s fiction shaped by a constant struggle between philosophy and perversions of it: “Two voices, one the true tone of philosophy and the other its flaw, its vice, its shadow of cynicism, sentimentalism, egoism, fatalism, struggle for control of the narrative. They struggle to control both the material of the plot, the story, and the material of the subplot, the reader’s allegiance” (116). Through the ironies of his narration, Meredith prevents this struggle ever from being decided, refuses to separate and

define these two voices, to banish philosophy's shadow: this is his wise folly.¹¹ The utopianism of Meredith's narrators, who always look forward to an audience with greater philosophy, is both a mark of their potentially foolish eccentricity and part of Meredith's dialogic achievement. By addressing a utopian future in which a full understanding of the human and the good will finally be attained, Meredith also addresses a present and a nearer future in which this understanding has yet to be achieved. He frees cultural wisdom from mere repetition, and he shares the rewriting of this wisdom with readers whose difference he can only prophesy.

¹¹ I use the term "irony" sparingly when describing the devices of wise folly, because irony can suggest an inversion function through which ironically affirming something merely affirms its contrary. As Barthes points out, this technique is readerly—it does not open the stereotypes of the cultural code to the reader's writing, because it merely adds another layer of stereotype to the code: "In fact, the cultural code occupies the same position as stupidity: how can stupidity be pinned down without declaring oneself intelligent?" (206). One answer: by declaring everyone stupid, including oneself, and taking things from there. Barthes recognizes such a manoeuvre in Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Wise folly is the art of such manoeuvres, and if it is an art of irony, then it is an art of unstable irony.

Chapter Three

George Eliot's Pharmacy

I is the first letter of the alphabet, the first word of the language, the first thought of the mind, the first object of affection. In grammar it is a pronoun of the first person and singular number. Its plural is said to be *We*, but how there can be more than one myself is doubtless clearer to the grammarians than it is to the author of this incomparable dictionary. Conception of two myselfs is difficult, but fine. The frank yet graceful use of "I" distinguishes a good writer from a bad; the latter carries it with the manner of a thief trying to cloak his loot. (Bierce, "I")

1. Maxims and Medicine

The title of this chapter refers to Derrida's essay *Plato's Pharmacy*, from which I will borrow three terms, "*pharmakon*," "*pharmakos*," and "*pharmakeus*": the drug that is also a poison, the victim of a healing sacrifice, and the druggist or magician who may also be a scapegoat. These usefully multivalent words capture ambiguities in the ethics of Eliot's novels, in her character-systems, and in the position of her narrators, and will structure the reading of Eliot's fiction that follows.¹ Though inspired in its play of antitheses by deconstructive methods,

¹ Alex Woloch defines his term "character-system" with reference to what he calls "character-space." A character-space in a narrative is "that particular and charged encounter between an individual human personality and a determined space and position within the narrative as a whole," while the character-system is "the arrangement of multiple and differentiated character-spaces—differentiated configurations and manipulations of the human figure—into a unified narrative structure" (14). The significance I attribute to minor characters in this chapter and in this dissertation more broadly is informed by Woloch's study of minoriness in *The One Versus the Many*, where he suggests that minor characters are liable to attract the reader's interest precisely *because* of their minoriness—because of the tension between the position allotted them in the character system and the "implied person" to which

this reading will not be deconstructive in its assumptions or its aims. Concerned with the text not as a system of signs but a dialogic design, I track warring ethical positions instead of warring forces of signification. The governing binary opposition in Eliot's ethics and in the ethical lexicon of her fiction is the opposition between egoism and sympathy, with egoism occupying the subordinate position of folly and sympathy occupying the superordinate position of wisdom. While a deconstructive reading of this ethical system would locate its fault lines, the sites where its binary oppositions break down, my object of inquiry is the encounter of this whole system with its constitutive other in Eliot's fiction. Although Eliot developed a doctrine of sympathy that she shares with her narrators and certain of her characters, her novels do not finally assert this doctrine because Eliot does not present a unified, singular view of the story's reality in which ethical terms have consistent values.

To say that Eliot does not present such a view is, in itself, merely to repeat Bakhtin's insight into the dialogic form of the novel. David Lodge argues that this dialogic form increases the reader's autonomy even when the narrative discourse seems designed to decrease it: "the authorial commentary, so far from telling the reader what to think, or putting him in a position of dominance in relation to the discourse of the characters, constantly forces him to think for himself, and constantly implicates him in the moral judgements being formulated" (53). Recognizing dialogue in the novel, however, is the beginning of my investigation, not its end. There are many ways in which novels can be dialogic, and the effects are not all identical or commensurate. Even extensive dialogue in a work does not necessarily prevent certain voices from dominating the dialogue. Cicely Havely Palser argues that Eliot's privileged narrative voice in *Middlemarch* obscures the dialogism that would otherwise prevail: "Chip away the authorial

their minorness limits the reader's access (38). This tension makes possible a play like Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*.

assertions and there is within *Middlemarch* is [*sic.*] a novel which can be read as one reads Tolstoy, a narrative in which no discourse has preferred status. *Middlemarch* is traditionally applauded for its maturity, but it often makes children of its readers” (318). This chapter examines a kind of dialogism peculiar to Eliot and, more broadly, to the nineteenth-century British realist novel, explaining how realist dialogue, despite its evident asymmetry, need not function coercively.

A realist like Meredith, Eliot situates the vision of her narrators within a social field, and like Meredith she integrates the limits of this vision into her representation of it. These limits help to imply a reality independent of the narrator, which the narrator must interpret along with the characters, albeit with some advantages. Although Eliot’s narrators use their advantages in favour of the doctrine of sympathy, the realism of her novels prevents a decisive rhetorical victory of sympathy over egoism. Certainly, the conflict seems imbalanced: egoism is often vanquished in Eliot’s fiction, and is not given full articulation as an ethical position. Yet Eliot communicates, often indirectly, the weight of what is sacrificed in this contest. The very techniques that enforce asymmetry in the drama and in the representation become ammunition for the other side, resources for critiquing the ethical system that occupies the privileged position in Eliot’s fiction. To make use of these resources, I argue, is not to read against the grain of the fiction’s design but to apprehend a larger and more complex design in which theorizing, illustrating, and encouraging sympathy is only one purpose among others. Another purpose, a cross-grain, is the self-critical turn of wise folly, the turning on oneself, through which Eliot implies the necessity and even the value of egoism.²

² Like Harry Shaw, I seek to complicate the metaphor of reading with or against “the grain” of a work. This metaphor is a way to talk about the work’s implied intention, design, or form, which, the metaphor suggests, one can only either reject or accept. Shaw proposes an alternative, reading *through* the grain, that is attentive to the “network of possibilities opened up by the existence of the grain” (*Narrating Reality* 143). The method I practice in this

Eliot's narration, like Meredith's, alternates between reflection and narration. The narrators explain the characters' actions by means of general assertions and justify these assertions with reference to the characters' actions. This gnomic style could invest realist narrators with an ultimate, self-fulfilling authority over both discourse and story; discourse and story, converging on a single system of ethical truths, would then constitute both the narrator's vision of reality and the novel's. As I have argued in Chapter Two, Meredith disrupts this convergence of story and discourse by anatomizing the art of generalization. Many of Meredith's characters, including his narrators, are leery of the gnomic speech at which they excel. Eliot's narrators can be similarly ambivalent. In fact, Diana Warwick's refusal in *Diana of the Crossways* to be "the dupe of the passion wherewith, as she says, 'we lash ourselves into the persuasive speech distinguishing us from the animals'" is probably indebted to the *Middlemarch* narrator's phrase "this power of generalizing which gives men so much the superiority in mistake over the dumb animals" (Meredith 14; Eliot 592). Persuasion and generalization meet in gnomic utterances, and while both these passages make a power of speech or thought into the distinction between the human and the animal, what is emphasized in either case is not the mere superiority of the human but our "superiority in mistake." (It takes a human to be asinine.) Eliot's gnome, like Diana's, strikes at itself, relying on the same power that it identifies as a source of error.³

There is more reason to take Eliot's gnomes seriously than Meredith's, however. That "lambent humour" that so pervades Meredith's narration infuses Eliot's subtly, but it competes with an earnest streak of moralism that depends on the gnomic style and that appears

dissertation is similarly an attempt to avoid the metaphor's constraints while recognizing that there are such things as more and less intentional readings. One way to do so is to conceive of the text's grain less unilaterally: at the very least, the realist text has a warp and a weft.

³ Here, as in Chapter Two, I use the word "gnome," the noun form of "gnomic," in order to designate the speech genre that contains condensed expressions of generalized wisdom or wit, including aphorisms, epigrams, maxims, and proverbs.

incompatible with the blows Eliot occasionally levels at generalization. As Susan Lanser observes, “Eliot’s professed distrust of quotation and maxim stands in Archimedean tension with her formal practices: if Eliot is suggesting that the authority of such forms is but a fiction, she does so through fiction’s arguably most authoritative, ‘nonfictional’ structures— precisely maxims and quotations, the conventional forms for authorial wisdom, detachable from the story proper and able to engage ‘that tempting range of relevancies called the universe’” (82). Arguing that Eliot neither “deconstruct[s] authoritative discourse” nor resists it, Lanser suggests that “the rhetoric of Eliot’s fiction arrogates authority in a project designed precisely to construct a narrative hegemony” (83). Perhaps, distrusting general statements, Eliot determines to write correct ones. Perhaps when the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* claims, “All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy,” this claim is not a formula against formulas but the personal wisdom of someone who has submitted to those divine promptings (Eliot 518). The narrator may have “exert[ed] patience, discrimination, impartiality,” may possess “the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human” (518). Or the narrator may simply be an exception, exempt from the labours that characters must complete to attain moral intelligence.⁴

⁴ Isobel Armstrong’s reading of Eliot’s gnomes in the 1970 volume *Critical Essays on George Eliot* epitomizes the view that Eliot does indeed offer a wisdom in her works that is detachable from them and that successfully applies to the reader’s world: “Her success depends, I think, upon her capacity to move beyond the moral universe of the novel, turn outwards towards the reader and to invoke a general body of moral and psychological knowledge or, rather, *experience*, which can be the corporate possession of both writer and reader; this shared experience is continually being brought to bear on the novel. She constantly asks for an assent, a corroboration from the reader, before she proceeds” (120, author’s emphasis). This assessment of Eliot represents the complement to mine: while I

On the other hand, if the “comprehensive and radical skepticism concerning the authority of language” that James Eli Adams locates in *Adam Bede* informs the passage about men of maxims in *The Mill on the Floss*, which similarly opposes the folly of speech to the wisdom of experience, then the narrator cannot so easily be exempted (239). The narrator does not bypass language to transmit experience to the reader, and therefore Eliot is faced with a problem that Adams identifies as typically realist: “The novelist *always* lacks an adequate vehicle for representing a realm located outside of language” (239, author’s emphasis). Those “dumb animals,” inferior in mistake, are superior in a kind of truth, closer to the ineffable that Eliot’s characters must encounter in order to develop wisdom and that Eliot strives to communicate: “‘the dumb creatures,’ as Mrs. Poyser calls them, thus assume the role of mute choric figures offering oblique commentary on the eminently *human* struggle to find an adequate language for feeling” (228).

Despite such doubts about language, Eliot’s most gnomic moments may well be some of her most striking, memorable, and characteristic—or, at the very least, her most frequently discussed: the “parable” of the pier-glass and the meditation on “that roar which lies on the other side of silence” in *Middlemarch* (264, 194), or the cry of the heart in *Adam Bede*, “let us love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy” (162), or the digressive analogy of the Rhine castles and the Rhône villages in *The Mill on the Floss*, among other examples (282-83). Such intrusions express values that are privileged throughout Eliot’s narratives, including an awareness of the limitations of human perspective and, consequently, a respect for the ordinary or seemingly trivial and a belief in imaginative sympathy as the basis of right relations between individuals. The respect for the

do not wish to deny the possibility of assenting, of taking Eliot’s gnomes to be wisdom, my focus is on the possibility and necessity of dissent.

ordinary is, as George Levine has thoroughly demonstrated, characteristic of the realistic imagination insofar as it defines itself in opposition to the conventions of romance; but attending to the ordinary seems much more like an ethical imperative in Eliot's realism than it does in Meredith's. In *The Egoist* Meredith chooses the "drawing-room of civilized men and women" over "the struggling outer world" (3), and in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* his recovery of the trivial is couched in the eccentric, prophetic language to which his narrators periodically resort:

One [audience] will come to whom it will be given to see the elementary machinery at work: who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow. To them will nothing be trivial, seeing that they will have in their eyes the invisible conflict going on around us, whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh, of ours perpetually changes. And they will perceive, moreover, that in real life all hangs together: the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow, that bursts upon the field of thousands. They will see the links of things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people now do, that this great matter came out of that small one. (237-38)

Be this audience if you can, the narrator dares us—but you cannot, for the time has not yet come. Any didactic design in this passage is complicated by its utopianism, which threatens to consign the present reader to the category of "foolish people," and by the context: whether or not it is possible to possess this comprehensive perception of the minute causes of large effects, failed attempts to do so are a serious form of error in this novel. Sir Austin's "System" for educating Richard, for example, appears to involve an overreading of the "elementary machinery" of male development, one that draws spurious links between puberty and the Fall of Man. The narrator allies his hypothetical audience with Austin by imagining that this audience "will participate in

the Baronet's gratification at his son's demeanour" (238). One probably does not want to participate in Sir Austin's readings of Richard.

In *Middlemarch*, on the other hand, the narrator clearly considers it a failing in Dorothea and Casaubon that they do not understand the full importance of the seemingly trivial, in this case the series of unremarkable acts that gradually increase the couple's estrangement from each other: "it is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are forever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made, and say, the earth bears no harvest of sweetness—calling their denial knowledge" (Eliot 425). Generalizing from Dorothea and Casaubon to "men and women," the narrator corrects on two counts what these men and women (mis)call things: the denial of the earth's "harvest of sweetness" is not really knowledge, and "these acts called trivialities" are not really trivial. If only people paid attention to the minor ways they squander their own promise of joy, they wouldn't blame the world for not generating any. This analysis of Dorothea's marriage both echoes and trumps Dorothea's original aspirations. Dorothea marries Casaubon in the first place hoping that the greatness of their shared life will make "these acts called trivialities" meaningful: she says to herself, "It would be my duty to study that I might help him the better in his great works. There would be nothing trivial about our lives. Everyday-things with us would mean the greatest things" (29). When the narrator corrects Dorothea for ignoring the importance of "every-day things," dramatic irony results: the narrator turns out to have a much better grasp of a kind of understanding that Dorothea only wishes to have. Eliot seems, in general, to value and cultivate this understanding, using it in her fine-grained representations of social and psychological causes and effects. While Meredith presents ambivalently the state of finding nothing trivial—maybe

it's not good to feel the winds of March when they do not blow—Eliot presents this state as a remedy for the waste of happiness and as the ideal basis of realist representation.

It may seem, then, that nothing is more foreign to Eliot's fiction than wise folly, which undermines the surety of moral imperatives. The fool can play the social physician, as Jaques aspires to do in *As You Like It*:

Invest me in my motley. Give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and through
Cleanse the foul body of th'infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine. (Shakespeare, *As You Like It* 2.7.58-61)

But the “medicine” of the man in motley might be disease, as the Duke retorts: “all th'embossèd sores and headed evils / That thou with licence of free foot hast caught / Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world” (2.7.67-69). Despite the earnestness of the prescriptions, Eliot's sovereign remedy, sympathy, is just such a fool's medicine, liable to reproduce or exacerbate the problems it is meant to address. Eliot's ethics of sympathy is not presented ironically; she commits to the development and illustration of a fully-fledged ethical system in her fiction, a system in which sympathy is aligned with wisdom and the good. Yet she also uses techniques of wise folly to convey the good that her system excludes as evil, which can only be recognized as good from an ethical perspective different from those of Eliot's narrators and many of her most central characters. Not foreign *to* Eliot's fiction but foreign *in* Eliot's fiction, wise folly lingers on the margins in characters who ignore, defy, ridicule, or simply do not care about the moral aims that others in her fiction genuinely strive to achieve, and who represent in various ways the disease of egoism that sympathy is supposed to cure. When we attempt to determine who in

Eliot's novels is outside the boundaries of right conduct, we discover that these boundaries are less certain than they seem, insides liable to become outsides. Apparently located at the origin and centre of their narratives, even the narrators are in some respects foreign bodies, working against their own didactic purposes—and towards the overarching purposes of Eliot's realism. The following sections will examine in turn the binary opposition of egoism and sympathy; marginal egoist characters, especially Hans Meyrick and Bob Jakin; and the characterization of Eliot's narrators. These elements of the forms of Eliot's novels work together to construct and scrutinize both the inside and the outside of Eliot's ethics of sympathy.

2. *Pharmakon*

In a gnome that resembles the fundamental gnomes of wise folly, which claim for humanity a birthright of folly and error, the narrator of *Middlemarch* proclaims, "We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves" (Eliot 211). (Again, folly inheres in a similarity between humans and animals that is made possible by a difference between humans and animals: the implicit distinction is between animals, who feed from udders, and "we" humans, who treat the world like one.) While a Shakespearean fool would identify himself with the state of folly he describes, Eliot's narrator leaves a loophole: though emphatically included in the subject "we are all of us," and at least pretending therefore to have been "born," the narrator may perhaps have grown out of the condition of moral stupidity, having thereby earned the authority to pronounce on it. In section four, we will assess the positions of Eliot's narrators with respect to their own ethical systems and the characters to whom they apply these systems. For now, it suffices to recognize that for most characters this moral stupidity, the supreme folly in Eliot's work, is a kind of naturalistic original sin, and,

though Eliot does not name it in this passage, its name in *Middlemarch* and elsewhere in her fiction is “egoism.” Eliot’s diagnosis of egoism and her prescription of sympathy as a remedy are nuanced, and the purpose of this section will be to identify these nuances before examining how forces outside this prescriptive system affect its function in Eliot’s fiction.

Eliot defines egoism in use and frequently qualifies it, drawing from the word’s common senses and adding specialized meanings in context, so that we would ignore an important fluidity in the term if we attempted to define it rigorously. Egoism in Eliot’s fiction can be, among many other things, “passionate” (*Daniel Deronda* 796, *Middlemarch* 423, *Scenes of Clerical Life* 229) or “fastidious” (*Daniel Deronda* 278), “exorbitant” (319) or “small” (*The Mill on the Floss* 384), “uneasy” (*Middlemarch* 211) or “untroubled” (*Felix Holt* 303), even “proud” and “honest” (*Mill on the Floss* 286). Egoism can be satisfied like desire (525, *Middlemarch* 521), irritated like a temper (68), wounded like pride (*Daniel Deronda* 50), and, because it can be wounded, risked (*Middlemarch* 478). Egoism is Sir James Chettam’s disapproval of the rival Dorothea chooses to marry, Gwendolen’s ignorance of Daniel’s life apart from her, Grandcourt’s assumption that everyone is envious of him, the attachment of various characters to their own theories or rules, and, perhaps most basically, the candle that shines on the pier-glass and arranges its scratches into concentric circles: the embodied and limited human perception that makes one the centre of one’s world.

Egoism is not always and uniformly bad, or, at least, is not incompatible with good. The “vices and virtues alike” of the Dodson family character are “phases of a proud, honest egoism,” and the “[d]eeds of kindness” which are “as easy . . . as a bad habit” to Arthur Donnithorne are “the common issue of his weaknesses and good qualities, of his egoism and his sympathy. He didn’t like to witness pain, and he liked to have grateful eyes beaming on him as the giver of

pleasure” (*The Mill on the Floss* 286; *Adam Bede* 280). Yet in Arthur’s case egoism is on the side of weakness while sympathy is parallel to good. Eliot’s narrators allow that virtue and kindness may sometimes issue from egoism, but clearly consider the “abandonment of egoism,” as the narrator of *The Mill on the Floss* terms it, to be a greater good (305).

The term “egoism” belongs to the narrative discourse with few exceptions: the word is applied once to Gwendolen in narration focalized through Grandcourt, twice to Savonarola in narration focalized through Romola, once to Maggie Tulliver in narration focalized through her, and twice to Philip Wakem by himself, once in focalized narration and once in his own direct speech, which is the only occasion that the word unambiguously belongs to a character’s voice and not the narrator’s. The term’s looseness of application is thus a property of the narrative rhetoric, not an effect of dialogue as in Meredith’s *The Egoist*. The narrator of *The Egoist* uses the word to frame his narrative in the preface, labeling Willoughby an egoist, naming the imaginary gnomonic encyclopaedia that contains the sum of human wisdom the “Book of Egoism,” and designating egoism as an object of laughter, the butt of the comic imps’ ridicule. Yet in an important sense “egoist” is first of all Willoughby’s own word and then Clara’s. In the chapter descriptively entitled “In Which Sir Willoughby Chances to Supply the Title for Himself,” Willoughby chances to supply his title after retelling an anecdote in which a gentleman implores doctors to save his ailing wife so that he won’t have to undergo the hardship of remarrying (Meredith, *The Egoist* 81). Willoughby declares, “That is the perfect Egoist,” and exhorts his fiancée to “Beware of marrying an Egoist” (81, 82). The word comes to embody for Clara everything that makes Willoughby repulsive to her—it is “her medical herb, her illuminating lamp, the key of him”—but what she means by it is to some degree incommunicable, so that she cannot use the word to explain to Willoughby, her father, or anyone else why she will not marry

him: “What could she say? he is an Egoist? The epithet has no meaning in such a scene” (82, 345). *The Egoist* arranges private meanings of “egoism” into a comic operatic ensemble, with Clara, Laetitia, and Vernon all confessing themselves egoists at various points in the narrative while the narrator, *basso continuo*, develops his own sense of the word in his wry gnostic commentary.

In Eliot’s fiction, by contrast, the word “egoism” and its variants, even when used in focalized narration, invoke the narrator’s moral lexicon and diagnostic powers. (Philip seems to share these with his narrator.) The name of the condition is no “medical herb” in itself, but by presenting characters as case studies of egoism Eliot’s narrators rhetorically prepare for their prescription of a remedy. Readers of Eliot know well that this remedy is sympathy, which is central to Eliot’s ethics and artistic practice and has accordingly received much attention. The ethics of sympathy has an autonomous existence in Eliot’s thought, apart from its instantiation in her fiction, and the synthetic work of explaining the principles of and sources for this philosophy has been ably accomplished. My focus here will be how this philosophy and its terms are applied in particular fictional instances. Eliot defines sympathy, like egoism, in use, and similarly creates varieties of sympathy by qualifying the term. While she depicts egoism as an initial condition she presents sympathy as a goal, so that, as we have seen, one should eschew maxims because “to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from *growing* insight and sympathy” (Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 518, emphasis mine). Egoism is so pervasive in Eliot’s work, however, so fundamentally human, that characters never fully escape it, and sympathy turns out to be a way of mitigating egoism that depends on, and sometimes exacerbates, egoism. Like writing, which supplements memory but in doing so makes memory worse, sympathy is a *pharmakon*, a remedy that is ambiguously also a poison.

Although we are told Dorothea “had early begun to emerge” from the “moral stupidity” of a primordial egoism, the narrator suggests she initially approaches sympathy wrongly:

[I]t had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference. (*Middlemarch* 211)

The narrator’s point is similar to the one Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth makes about sympathy in Eliot: “This perception of difference is the key to sympathy, a much misunderstood term in George Eliot that does not imply giving up the self” (232). Dorothea seeks to escape egoism by submitting herself to Casaubon and his project, but her devotion is founded in egoism. She does not conceive that Casaubon’s values, aims, and desires might be different from hers, let alone incompatible with them. Because Casaubon’s “centre of self” is equivalent to Dorothea’s, it is not Dorothea’s, and Dorothea must therefore, from her own centre, imagine what Casaubon’s might be like. The problem of knowing others is persistent for Eliot, as several critics have remarked.⁵ Sympathy thus requires, in Ellen Argyros’s words, “a kind of imaginative transportation beyond the boundaries of the self” (1). Although Ermarth insists that true sympathy in Eliot does not require self-renunciation, self-renunciation is frequently part of the process by which Eliot’s characters, imperfect creatures, attempt to transport themselves: Dorothea’s early asceticism and Maggie’s conversion to *The Imitation of Christ* may not lead directly to sympathy, and may confuse egoism with desire, but such renunciations are signs that

⁵ See, for example, J. Hillis Miller’s “George Eliot: The Roar on the Other Side of Silence” in *Others*, George Levine’s “*Daniel Deronda*: A New Epistemology,” and Part II of Kay Young’s *Imagining Minds*.

Dorothea and Maggie are uncomfortably aware of their investments in self, which sets them apart from more entrenched egoists like Celia and Tom.

However disapprovingly such renunciations are narrated, they are similar in function to the imaginative displacement that Daniel Deronda, master of sympathy, practises on the Thames just before he meets Mirah: “He was forgetting everything else in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with the objects he was looking at, thinking how far it might be possible habitually to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape” (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 189). Daniel’s “centre” recalls Casaubon’s “centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference.” Daniel’s “personality” implies in this context, more than mere character, his existence as a person. Daniel tries to project this personality outside himself towards the objects with which he identifies, leaving nevertheless some remainder *inside* still designated “him.” It is syntactically ambiguous whether Daniel’s shifting “centre” is to be identified with his personality or the other of his personality, the Daniel that leaves to join the landscape or the Daniel that stays inside, and of course each of these must be a centre with respect to the other. This duplication of Daniel’s centre answers his question: it is not possible “habitually to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape.” Eliot’s metaphors of centres and circles imply a model of the unified subject under which one cannot get outside oneself, because the self that one left behind would become absolutely other, would no longer *be* oneself. Daniel’s peculiar thought experiment reveals the game that sympathy plays with the language and the boundaries of self. Sympathy may be the act of recognizing another person as a different centre of self, while also imaginatively identifying with that other self, but the sympathetic imagination

is necessarily circumscribed by egoism, by one's centredness in the pier glass: sympathy for Eliot can be no more than an exploration of one's own margins in another's direction.

In the discourse of wise folly, the only possible wisdom exists in and through folly. In Eliot's fiction one can only ever, like Dorothea, *begin* to emerge from the stupidity of egoism. One can make progress but not escape, approaching asymptotically the line that defines oneself and keeps others at a distance, however infinitesimal. Sympathy exists within these bounds: as the narrator of "Janet's Repentance" says, "sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form" (*Scenes of Clerical Life* 258). Sympathy nevertheless has great value in Eliot's novels. The small good that Dorothea does for the Lydgates and the "incalculably diffusive" "effect of her being on those around her," Daniel's friendship with the alienated Mordecai, and Romola's compassion for her husband's mistress and their children are all examples of achieved sympathy (*Middlemarch* 838). Yet many examples of sympathy in Eliot, including these, are potentially troubling because the gains are so modest or the sacrifices so great, even when sympathy is not approached through self-renunciation. Sympathy is not the cure for egoism: sympathy, inextricable from egoism, is a *pharmakon*: "This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent" (Derrida 70).

Daniel, for instance, is both a paragon of the sympathetic imagination and the best example of its flaws. The problem is not that his "acts of considerateness . . . str[ike] his companions as moral eccentricity," nor even that his "many-sided sympathy . . . threaten[s] to hinder any persistent course of action," but that he has too much faith in his own imagining of others' difference (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 178, 364). After Mirah tells Daniel that Hans Meyrick has likened him to the Buddha feeding himself to a tigress, there ensues an exchange about

beauty and truth between Daniel, Mirah, and Hans's sisters in which Daniel eagerly becomes Mirah's interpreter:

"Pray don't imagine that [I am like Bouddha]," said Deronda, who had lately been finding such suppositions rather exasperating. "Even if it were true that I thought so much of others, it would not follow that I had no wants for myself. When Bouddha let the tigress eat him he might have been very hungry himself."

"Perhaps if he was starved he would not mind so much about being eaten," said Mab, shyly.

"Please don't think that, Mab; it takes away the beauty of the action," said Mirah.

"But if it were true, Mirah?" said the rational Amy, having a half-holiday from her teaching; "you always take what is beautiful as if it were true."

"So it is," said Mirah, gently. "If people have thought what is the most beautiful and the best thing, it must be true. It is always there."

"Now, Mirah, what *do* you mean?" said Amy.

"I understand her," said Deronda, coming to the rescue. "It is a truth in thought though it may never have been carried out in action. It lives as an idea. Is that it?"

He turned to Mirah, who was listening with a blind look in her lovely eyes.

"It must be that, because you understand me, but I cannot quite explain," said Mirah, rather abstractedly—still searching for some expression. (466)

Mirah appears to be advancing an aesthetic theory in which beauty is necessarily truth, but falters on the ambiguous pronouns "it" and "there," which together make her statement "It is always there" inscrutable. There is something potentially mock-heroic in Daniel's rush to the "rescue,"

and that potential is fulfilled when his speech fails to capture what Mirah means, whatever she does mean. He makes a distinction between thought and action that was nowhere implied by her speech, and the reference to a “blind look in her lovely eyes” suggests that he has not hit the mark, and, perhaps, is paying more attention to her eyes than to what she has said. With “you understand me,” Mirah defers to Daniel’s acknowledged powers of sympathy, then tunes out the ensuing banter about the Buddha and tigers while she formulates a statement significantly different from his: “I think I can say what I mean, now. . . . When the best thing comes into our thoughts, it is like what my mother has been to me. She has been just as really with me as all the other people about me—often more really with me” (466). Daniel is not enlightened by this explanation, which figures the beautiful truth not as a persistent idea but as a spectre; he is only painfully reminded of what Mirah’s absent mother is to *him*. Daniel fears Mirah’s mother is the wife of the common pawnbroker Ezra Cohen and, “inwardly wincing under this illustration, which brought other possible realities about that mother vividly before him, presently turned the conversation” (466). The failure to communicate in this exchange illustrates how Daniel’s sympathy translates Mirah into his own terms, while he, preoccupied with this translation, pays little attention to her terms.⁶

Such blithe translation occurs on a larger scale when Daniel attempts to understand Judaism, which proves a challenge to his sympathy. Daniel displays an aversion to the ordinary Jewish characters that he meets, such as Ezra Cohen, whom Daniel does not find sufficiently romantic: “Ezra Cohen was not clad in the sublime pathos of the martyr, and his taste for money-getting seemed to be favoured with that success which has been the most exasperating difference

⁶ Forest Pyle identifies a similar moment in *Adam Bede* when Dinah, another deliberate practitioner of sympathy, fails in her sympathy for Hetty (156-57). Pyle is skeptical of characters’ powers of sympathy in Eliot, relegating sympathy to the narrative discourse rather than the story: “Since no individual character in Eliot’s novels can make sympathy work, and since imagination creates in these stories ‘thorny thickets of sin and sorrow,’ the effective work of sympathy must be assigned—‘transferred’—to the act of narration itself” (158).

in the greed of Jews during all the ages of their dispersion. This Jeshurun of a pawnbroker was not a symbol of the great Jewish tragedy” (517). The narration, focalized through Daniel, slightly revises but ultimately reinscribes an abhorrent stereotype, allowing greed, on the one hand, to be universal but calling *successful* greed a Jewish trait. The narrator’s position is difficult to judge here: “the sublime pathos of the martyr,” “Jeshurun of a pawnbroker,” and the manipulation of the stereotype sound arch, suggesting a distance between the narrator’s voice and Daniel’s—the narrator is probably articulating for Daniel his inarticulate aversion to Ezra, and doing him no favours in the process. Yet the archness is not necessarily satirical, and the narrator may share Daniel’s views: elsewhere the narrator apologizes for Daniel’s grotesque fantasies of what Mirah’s family might look like by saying, “Excuse him: his mind was not apt to run spontaneously into insulting ideas, or to practice a form of wit which identifies Moses with the advertisement sheet; but he was just now governed by dread, and if Mirah’s parents had been Christian, the chief difference would have been that his forebodings would have been fed with wider knowledge” (207). Here, the narrator repeats the attempt to mitigate Daniel’s conception of Jews by universalizing his negative preconceptions—there are many ways that a Christian family could be unpleasant, too. Like the apologies for Diana in *Diana of the Crossways*, this apology might strike one as unconvincing. Daniel uses a similar logic when he reminds himself that “there are queer-looking Christians of the same mixed *morale*” as the “queer-looking Israelites” he encounters (366). Daniel’s efforts to counteract his prejudice by thinking ill of all creeds equally only make it clearer that he is especially disposed to find Jewish characters “cheat[ing],” “grisly,” “dingy,” and “vulgar,” unworthy of his ideal of the tragic Jew, which he finds fulfilled exclusively in Mordecai and Mirah (366).

The point here is not merely that Daniel is prejudiced but that his prejudice is implicated in his sympathy: his sympathy consists not in reaching out imaginatively to the Jews he meets, but in imagining the Judaism that he wishes to know. His romantic ideal of Judaism is so fixed that, when he visits a synagogue, ostensibly out of “historic sympathy” with Judaism and in order to understand it better, he homogenizes the service, which is in a language he does not understand, reducing it to his fixed idea:

The Hebrew liturgy, like others, has its transitions of litany, lyric, proclamation, dry statement and blessing; but this evening all were one for Deronda: the chant of the *Chazan*’s or Reader’s grand wide-ranging voice with its passage from monotony to sudden cries, the outburst of sweet boys’ voices from the little quire, the devotional swaying of men’s bodies backwards and forwards, the very commonness of the building and shabbiness of the scene where a national faith, which had penetrated the thinking of half the world, and moulded the splendid forms of that world’s religion, was finding a remote, obscure echo—all were blent for him as one expression of a binding history, tragic and yet glorious. (367-68)

I am offering an especially *unsympathetic* reading of what for Daniel is an intensely spiritual experience, but this reading exposes the degree to which that experience has little to do with Judaism specifically and, therefore, the degree to which Daniel’s sympathy appropriates its object. The narrator again remains at a distance from Daniel: the narrator fills in the variety and detail of the liturgy in order to explain exactly what Daniel is not noticing. Whether the narrator approves or merely describes Daniel’s experience of the service, the narrator clearly demarcates the difference between the experience and the service. Daniel also shows some awareness of this difference, but he evaluates it in his favour, imagining that the service has meant more to him

than to the practising Jews who understand Hebrew: “with the cessation of the devotional sounds and the movement of many indifferent faces and vulgar figures before him there darted into his mind the frigid idea that he had probably been alone in his feeling, and perhaps the only person in the congregation for whom the service was more than a dull routine” (368). Is “frigid” Daniel’s admission or the narrator’s judgment? “Frigid” because the lack of authentic religious feeling Daniel has attributed to the Jews is chilling to him, or because it is chilling that he has thought to attribute it to them? In either case, an icy core of egoism is visible here within Daniel’s sympathetic imagination. What he sympathizes with is his own deeply-felt imagining of a religious tradition to which he is still, in effect, an outsider; his imagination of the insider’s experience, of the Jews’ “dull routine,” is presumptuous and thin. It would not be difficult to extend such a judgment to Daniel’s general conduct, seeing, for example, Daniel’s position as Gwendolen’s confessor and advisor as similarly unearned—as Daniel’s egoism feeding off hers.

Like wisdom in the tradition of wise folly, sympathy in Eliot’s fiction is won out of a condition of egoism, is never safely antithetical to egoism, and sometimes turns out to be egoism. This ambiguity, the ambiguity of the *pharmakon*, makes available to the reader, even plausible to the reader, the judgment that Daniel is presumptuous. I mean to claim more, however, than that this judgment is available and plausible: its availability and plausibility are a working part of the design of *Daniel Deronda*, an effect of Eliot’s realism. The narrator never diagnoses Daniel explicitly, and though there may be a diagnosis hiding in the dialogic difference between the narrator’s voice and Daniel’s, when apologizing for Daniel the narrator does not appear committed to naming and examining his flaws. If Eliot’s narrative rhetoric were too insistent on the duplicity of the *pharmakon*, however, that rhetoric would be entirely different in character—more prone to wry cynicism, like Meredith’s, and less capable of the ambitious moralizing that

is, in various proportions and to various readers of Eliot, inspiring and frustrating. It seems like what I am describing is a contradiction, the sort that results from attempting to conceal ideology: in order to advance an ethics of sympathy, Eliot needs to sweep complications under the carpet, from whence they spill of their own accord. These complications are not under a carpet, however; they are merely unarticulated by the narrator. Eliot's fiction turns against the ethics of sympathy not, finally, through the voice that advocates it, but through the encounter of that voice with others. In order to apprehend the ethics of Eliot's work, both its grain and its cross-grain, it will be necessary to question the centrality of the narrators and the marginality of certain characters, or, more precisely, to reinterpret the relation between centre and margin. We will begin at the margin, where the scapegoats live.

3. *Pharmakos*

Thus far we have largely been concerned with the ethical language and judgments, implicit and explicit, of narrators. The explicit judgments are expressed most pointedly in gnomes, which illuminate the implicit judgments of the surrounding narration. Not all ethical judgments in fiction are attributable to narrators, however, or even to characters, because of the basic realist convention that a story and its diegesis exist autonomously from the narrative discourse, however completely the discourse mediates our understanding of the story. That is, even given a novel like *Vanity Fair* where the narrator toys with the distinction between story and discourse, taking responsibility for penning his puppets around the stage, we still talk about what Becky Sharp does and what happens to her, not what the narrator makes Becky Sharp do or causes to happen to her. We do, however, talk about what *authors* make happen in stories, and thus moral judgments may be communicated through character systems and plot that, as it were,

bypass the narrator and can be attributed directly to an implied or real author, depending on the kind of claim one wants to make. Although realist authors like Thackeray, Meredith, and Eliot insert the materials of plot and character into evaluative systems sustained by a gnomic style, these materials are not raw stuff, devoid of ethical significance until judged by a narrator. Particular characters and actions have socio-historical valences, and on a broad literary-historical scale, across authors, works, and time, these valences are encoded formally in typical characters and genres.⁷ Once an audience has identified the villain of a melodrama by conventional cues, little independent judgment is required in order to read his actions as evil, unless or until other cues indicate that the convention is being subverted. If a reader identifies a narrative as one in which the author doles out reward and punishment according to the deserts of characters—an exemplum or a parable, for instance—then reward and punishment become indices of the narrative’s ethical premises, which in these genres are often made explicit in gnomes. When the ethical import of such a story agrees with the ethical judgments of the gnomic discourse, the effect is strongly didactic. When the ethical implications of the story diverge from the explicit moral, irony can result. This irony is visible in Chaucer’s narrative poetry and detectable, but less pronounced, in John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. Allowing the narrative to get away from its moral framework in this way is a form of wise folly, and it reaches its full development in the realist novel.

Eliot’s novels, like most realist novels, incorporate and transform other conventional forms. *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* are both constructed around marriage plots, deriving from these plots their cadential structure, their modulations from suspense to closure. Such a use

⁷ Cf. Bakhtin: “Shakespeare, like any artist, constructed his works not out of inanimate elements, not out of bricks, but out of forms that were already heavily laden with meaning, filled with it. We may note in passing that even bricks have a certain spatial form and, consequently, in the hands of the builder they express something” (*Speech Genres* 5).

of the marriage plot raises expectations of a comic resolution in which marriage synecdochally represents social integration (Frye 43-49). Marriage does not necessarily function as a reward earned by the characters involved, and, as Northrop Frye notes in *Anatomy of Criticism*, his ambitious taxonomy of intertextual forms, the comic ending does not require justice to be dealt: “The comic hero will get his triumph whether what he has done is sensible or silly, honest or rascally” (43). The genre of comedy competes in Eliot’s novels with others, however, including tragedy and the genre of the exemplum, in which the characters’ actions and the consequences of their actions serve didactic ends. Eliot’s narrators sometimes explicitly encourage us to view their narratives as exempla. The prelude and, more cautiously, the finale of *Middlemarch* frame Dorothea as a modern saint Theresa, prevented by “the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion” from achieving anything greater than that “incalculably diffusive” good effect on those around her (Eliot 838). The gnomic style also lends itself to an exemplary form in which the rhetorics of story and discourse reinforce each other: the plot proves the gnomes.

Readers construe this exemplary form when we adduce actions and consequences in a narrative as evidence of an authorial judgment. Stefanie Markovits, for example, cites the plot of *Romola* in an argument about Eliot’s ambivalent treatment of action in her fiction: “The book is still conservative, and political activity ends in disaster,” she writes, the idea being that the disaster eschatologically tells us something about political activity in Eliot’s view (792). With a similar logic, Bruce K. Martin, arguing that in *Middlemarch* “as in her other fiction, George Eliot’s narration is infused with suggestions of a morally efficient universe, stocked with determinable motives and actions, where deeds ultimately carry influence, consequence, punishment and reward,” objects to what he perceives as Eliot’s favouring of the rather

irresponsible and immature Fred Vincy, which “constitutes a compromise of the values central to the novel and, indeed, a symptom of problems within its ideological center,” and which “unravels both the moral and the aesthetic design of *Middlemarch*” (4). Martin reads Fred’s unearned rewards, especially marriage to the strong-willed Mary Garth, as an ideological symptom: Eliot gives Fred a world “where wisdom consists, above all, in acceding to the existent social order as a self-evident and permanent good,” and thereby retreats into bourgeois conventionalism instead of examining “the real struggles of class and ideology” (17).

In contrast to such insistence on the exemplarity of Eliot’s plots, Catherine Brown cites a passage from Eliot’s essay “Morality of *Wilhelm Meister*” in which Eliot condemns the false morality of poetic justice:

Just as far from being really moral is the so-called moral denouement, in which rewards and punishments are distributed according to those notions of justice on which the novel-writer would have recommended that the world should be governed if he had been consulted at the creation. The emotion of satisfaction which a reader feels when the villain of the book dies of some hideous disease, or is crushed by a railway train, is no more essentially moral than the satisfaction which used to be felt in whipping culprits at the cart-tail. (Qtd. in Brown, 305)

Despite this cautionary quotation, Brown nevertheless suggests that there are “notions of justice” in *Daniel Deronda*, and that “the suffering with which Gwendolen’s egotism is punished accords imperfectly” with this justice (306). In brief, Brown reads Gwendolen as a “scapegoat” figure, whose transgressions are punished more than Mrs. Glasher’s, and whose exclusion from the high seriousness of Daniel, Mirah, and Mordecai’s plot denies her suffering a tragic status. For Brown, Gwendolen “is rendered a victim in relation to Daniel’s world in that her own is

discontinuous with his, and she is excluded from the ethnic and aesthetic categories correspondent to the novel's ideals. In addition, her downfall throws his success into relief" (318). Markovits concurs: "George Eliot sacrifices any potential for realistic progress when she scapegoats Gwendolen, leaving her behind to suffer in an outdated England while Daniel departs for Palestine and the future" (793). Hetty Sorrel in *The Mill on the Floss*, as Neil Hertz notes, tends to be treated as another such scapegoat: "Hetty in particular seems to many critics to have been especially meanly dealt with, allowed, for the space of a few pages, the most intense inner experience recorded in the novel, then dismissed from it not once but twice—first transported to the colonies, then killed off, it would seem gratuitously, in the Epilogue, while on her way home to England after serving out her sentence" (96). In the cases of Fred and these scapegoats what troubles critics is a sense that Eliot is promising and failing to deliver an intelligible ethical teleology in her fiction.

Though Eliot's narrators do invite teleological reading to a degree, such reading is liable to be frustrated by her novels, because it is on the level of story and character, not on the level of the narrative discourse, that Eliot's fiction is at its most dialogic. Teleological readings ignore, for example, the important role of the arbitrary in Eliot's plotting. If George Eliot's narration is, as Martin writes, "infused with suggestions of a morally efficient universe," this infusion is titrated in a dialogic solution of available positions, one of which is that the world is governed by natural, not moral law. Certainly, the world of Eliot's fiction is not on the other hand "a morally arbitrary universe," but it is, in Ermarth's words, a "material universe" with "indecipherable expanses," a world in which, for example, a flash flood can wash away a central plot and make nonsense of many of its central ethical and erotic problems: thus the ending of *The Mill on the Floss* (Martin 11, Ermarth 225). The intentions of Eliot's narrators, including their philosophies,

their teleological readings of actions and consequences, and their powerful metaphors, are imposed on plots that do not necessarily justify or refute those intentions, and that are amenable to other readings, including other generic categorizations. These competing readings are worth examining further for what they reveal about competing ethical systems in Eliot's novels.

Gwendolen may indeed be read as a scapegoat, and Fred as something like a reverse scapegoat, a golden ass: yet, as Eliot herself recognizes in her remarks about "whipping culprits at the cart-tail," the functions of the *pharmakos* figure in life and literature have a complicated relationship to morality in which the unfairness of the punishment (or, in Fred's case, the serendipity of the reward) is part of the meaning of the figure.

"The character of the *pharmakos*," Derrida writes, "has been compared to a scapegoat. The *evil* and the *outside*, the expulsion of the evil, its exclusion out of the body (and out) of the city—these are the two major senses of the character and of the ritual" (130). The ritual was the ancient Greek practice in which, usually during the festival of Thargelia but also during times of crisis, two ugly, lower-class, criminal or otherwise marginal persons were exiled from a city, and perhaps sacrificed, in order to ensure the good of the populace (Bremmer). The corresponding character has been described by Northrop Frye as typical of ironic tragedy and ironic comedy. In ironic tragedy the *pharmakos* is an isolated tragic figure, suffering a doom out of proportion with any of his or her actions; in ironic comedy the *pharmakos* is the Malvolio or Shylock figure whose punishment or exclusion from the comic society is cause for celebration from that society's point of view, but, from the *pharmakos*'s perspective and potentially ours, is unjust (Frye 41-42, 45-47). The irony in Frye's ironic tragedy and ironic comedy stems from the lack of a neat moral teleology in these literary modes: we are aware that neither the downfall of the tragic *pharmakos* nor the exclusion of the comic *pharmakos* are entirely merited. The difference

between the tragic and comic *pharmakoi*, between victim and gull, is therefore only a matter of perspective (the individual's or the community's). In a realist novel, in which multiple perspectives are faithfully represented, ironic comedy and ironic tragedy can coexist as competing forms through which the story may be understood.⁸

The *pharmakos* also complicates perspective, however, making it difficult to separate the *pharmakos* sharply from the society that attempts to purge him. Derrida uses the *pharmakos* to deconstruct the binary opposition between outside and inside because the *pharmakos*, in order to be made representative of an outside evil and cast outside the city, must already be inside the community casting him out:

The ceremony of the *pharmakos* is thus played out on the boundary line between inside and outside, which it has as its function ceaselessly to trace and retrace.

Intra muros/extra muros. The origin of difference and division, the *pharmakos* represents evil both introjected and projected. Beneficial insofar as he cures—and for that, venerated and cared for—harmful insofar as he incarnates the powers of evil—and for that, feared and treated with caution. Alarming and calming. Sacred and accursed. (133)

Through his different mode of reading, Frye similarly arrives at a view of the *pharmakos* as a double figure that can signal the evil in the very society that designates him evil and casts him out: “Insisting on the theme of social revenge on an individual, however great a rascal he may be, tends to make him look less involved in guilt and the society more so. This is particularly true of characters who have been trying to amuse either the actual or the internal audience, and who are the comic counterparts of the tragic hero as artist” (45). The wise-foolish court jester as he appears in Shakespeare is a version of the *pharmakos*, with the ambiguity of the figure self-

⁸ See Brown on *Daniel Deronda*'s tragicomedy.

consciously incorporated into the role: the fool is kept near to the sovereign, at the symbolic heart of the state, but is designated an outsider to the social order of that state, exempt from the rules that govern speech and conduct, and thereby able to address the sovereign as no insider could. From this position, the fool embodies a negative ethical category, folly, but also represents and expresses the possibility that there is wisdom in folly, that the state's valuation of the category is incorrect. It is difficult to determine whether the fool's political function is radical or conservative, because, while the fool's role allows him to introduce radical critique, it also contains that critique in a devalued category. As a fictional figure, however, the fool is not just launching satire at a social order that is free to ignore him, but also sharing his resistance with an audience or readers who are free to take him to heart. Using the *pharmakos* in a similar way, Eliot purges egoism from the privileged communities of her novels in the person of scapegoat characters, simultaneously permitting scapegoat characters to strike back in the novels' ethical dialogues. Her *pharmakoi*, significant by virtue of the very process of narrative and moral selection that marginalizes them, point to flaws in the privileged moral order from which they are excluded.⁹

Daniel's friend and would-be rival Hans Meyrick is exactly the kind of comic artist that Frye describes, and his function as *pharmakos* is a largely unexamined dimension of the ethics of *Daniel Deronda*. Hans has a singular status in the text. He is a painter, which profession places him, like Klesmer, at the margins of a social hierarchy based primarily on birth and wealth, and gives him greater freedom of expression. He is miserably star-crossed, his misfortunes a parody

⁹ The distinction I make between the sacrifice of the *pharmakos* within a narrative and the resulting significance of the *pharmakos* in the work's ethical dialogue resembles the distinction Woloch makes between a minor character's minoriness and the character's importance to the reader: "Minor characters exist *as* a category . . . only because of their strange centrality to so many texts, perhaps to narrative signification itself. But this is not to say that once we acknowledge the significance of the minor character, he suddenly becomes major, breaking out of his subordinate position in the narrative discourse. This would be to elide the very source through which the minor character signifies—and is made significant to the reader who strangely remembers" (37). Minoriness is one form that the sacrifice of the *pharmakos* can take.

of the teleological “Nemesis” that may or may not explain the consequences of actions in Eliot: “Hans was made for mishaps: his very limbs seemed more breakable than other people’s—his eyes more of a resort for uninvited flies and other irritating guests” (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 378). This singularity helps to mark Hans as an “*eccentric*” in Woloch’s binary categorization of minor characters: the eccentric “grates against his or her position and is usually, as a consequence, wounded, exiled, expelled, ejected, imprisoned, or killed (within the *discourse*, if not the *story*)” (25). Hans is the character in *Daniel Deronda* with the best-developed sense of humour, a foil to the ever-earnest Daniel. Hans is also an egoist, a parallel of Gwendolen, who loves Mirah where Gwendolen loves Daniel, and who like Gwendolen is conspicuously absent from the marriage at the end of the novel. Like Daniel and Gwendolen or Mirah and Gwendolen, Daniel and Hans form what Hertz calls a “structure of double surrogation,” in which each of two characters is associated with one half of an ethical binary: “In each case the valuing of the ‘good’ surrogate is matched by the abjection or exile of her (or his) ‘bad’ partner” (101, 102).

Hans’s exclusion is part of the cost of the ending, which in its rough outlines is traditionally comic. “If Hans could have been there, it would have been better,” we are told, but he cannot be because he was so “ridiculous” and “inconvenient,” in his sisters’ opinion, as to fall in love with the bride (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 809). Though Hans’s exile is self-imposed, like Jaques’s in *As You Like It*, Hans is no melancholiac. His levity, always in tension with Daniel’s gravity, becomes incompatible with it when they become rivals for Mirah’s affections, and the end of the novel enacts the “rejection of the entertainer, whether fool, clown, buffoon, or simpleton,” which, as Frye writes, “can be one of the most terrible ironies known to art, as the rejection of Falstaff shows, and certain scenes in Chaplin” (45). This irony is terrible because the entertainer has a special relationship to the reader—insofar as Falstaff’s cynical humour and wit

exist to amuse us, one's enjoyment of Falstaff is at odds with one's recognition that his amorality and vice, the wellsprings of his humour, have no place in Hal's state.

In *Daniel Deronda* the ability to, as Frye writes, "amuse either the actual or the internal audience" is a rare skill. Hans possesses this skill, and it is implicated in his exclusion. The very statement of his amorality is an epigram that exemplifies his ability to amuse: "Hans had always said that in point of virtue he was a *dilettante*: which meant that he was very fond of it in other people, but if he meddled with it himself he cut a poor figure. Perhaps in reward of his good behaviour he gave his tongue the more freedom" (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 798). The first (and, as far as we know, the only) time that Daniel sees Mirah laugh is when she recounts the tragicomic mimicry that Hans has performed for her: "When Deronda went to Chelsea he was not made as comfortable as he ought to have been by Mrs. Meyrick's evident release from anxiety about the beloved but incalculable son [Hans, who has returned undamaged from Italy]. Mirah seemed livelier than before, and for the first time he saw her laugh" (464). The description of lively Mirah seems offered almost in explanation of Daniel's discomfort; after all, it has just been revealed that the "image of Mirah changing" is part of what Daniel finds so repugnant about Hans's infatuation with her (464). A laughing Mirah is indeed a changed Mirah, as Mrs. Meyrick attests: "We hardly thought that Mirah could laugh till Hans came" (464). Mirah laughs in spite of her usual disposition: "'I used never to like comic things on the stage—they were dwelt on too long; but all in one minute Mr Hans makes himself a blind bard, and then Rienzi addressing the Romans, and then an opera-dancer, and then a desponding young gentleman—I am sorry for them all, and yet I laugh, all in one'—here Mirah gave a little laugh that might have entered into a song" (464). There is little explanation in Mirah's speech for this unaccustomed reaction

except for the “all in one minute,” as if Hans has by sheer speed circumvented Mirah’s distaste for levity and raised a laugh along with her sympathy.

We know something about the probable origins of this distaste in Mirah’s father, a performer and stage manager with a comic bent. Mirah tells Daniel, “It was his nature to take everything lightly; and I soon left off asking him any question about things that I cared for much, because he always turned them off with a joke” (216). Mirah especially loathes her father’s mocking mimicry of Jews, which seems to her a betrayal of their people. Such mockery threatens her view of the world: “For there were some things—when they were laughed at I could not bear it: the world seemed like a hell to me. Is this world and all the life upon it only like a farce or a vaudeville, where you find no great meanings? Why then are there tragedies and grand operas, where men do difficult things and choose to suffer? I think it is silly to speak of all things as a joke” (216-17). Mirah’s distrust of jokes resonates with Daniel’s, which also appears to originate in his youth. Daniel remembers the farmer Mr. Banks making a joke at his expense with “a cunning laugh”: “He features the mother, eh?” (170). “At that time little Daniel had merely thought that Banks made a silly face, as the common farming men often did—laughing at what was not laughable; and he rather resented being winked at and talked of as if he did not understand everything” (170). When Daniel later understands more and realizes that the joke bears on his uncertain parentage, it of course does not become any more laughable to him.

As the narrator says, “A difference of taste in jokes is a great strain on the affections” (163). Though Hans’s mimicry introduces Mirah to a mixed laughter that can coexist with sympathy, Hans’s humour has the indifference that Mirah finds so hostile to her worldview. He responds to the death of Grandcourt with quips like “I never knew anybody die conveniently before” and with jokes about Daniel marrying the newly-available Gwendolen (727). (His

remark “And I shall be invited to the wedding” underscores his absence from the wedding that does occur [727].) In response to Hans’s jesting, Mirah undergoes a dramatic “sudden transformation” (728). Taking on a “look of anger that might have suited Ithuriel,” she “burst[s] into indignant speech as creatures in intense pain bite and make their teeth meet even through their own flesh, by way of making their agony bearable” (728). Mirah’s manner emphasizes Hans’s difference from her, and her speech emphasizes Hans’s difference from Daniel: “Mr Deronda would not like you to speak so” (728). Hans is ashamed, but his humour remains irrepressible: “‘I am a fool and a brute, and I withdraw every word. I’ll go and hang myself like Judas—if it’s allowable to mention him.’ Even in Hans’s sorrowful moments, his improvised words had inevitably some drollery” (728). Both Hans and Mirah herself conclude from their clash that Mirah loves Daniel, and clearly one explanation of Mirah’s vehement rebuke is that she is jealous of Gwendolen. It is also significant, however, that a violent incompatibility of humour between Mirah and Hans initiates Mirah’s reflection on her love for Daniel. While Hans’s affection for Mirah causes Daniel to entertain unhappily the “image of Mirah changing,” Mirah similarly sees Gwendolen as alien to the Daniel she knows, a “woman who belonged to another world than her own and Ezra’s—nay, who seemed another sort of being than Deronda, something foreign that would be a disturbance in his life instead of a blending with it” (733). The marriage ending symbolically confirms the blending of Mirah and Daniel and the foreignness of Gwendolen and Hans to the happy couple.¹⁰

Hans and Gwendolen, *pharmakoi*, are alien in similar ways and for similar reasons.

Though Hans is a minor romantic painter and Gwendolen a daughter of wealth who, once her

¹⁰ See Levine: “Understanding at last the radical otherness of Deronda and the world he enters, she [Gwendolen] is perhaps morally redeemed but the very form of the novel confirms her marginalization by turning to the wedding of Daniel with Mirah and the spiritual betrothal of Daniel and Mordecai” (“*Daniel Deronda: A New Epistemology*” 58).

family is ruined, marries into wealth again, they are both egoists and humourists, and they both exemplify the egoism of humour. Gwendolen “rather valued herself on her superior freedom in laughing where others might only see matter for seriousness,” and this superior freedom accompanies an inferior capacity for sympathy, such that Gwendolen can laugh at Rex’s horse-riding accident just as Hans makes light of Grandcourt’s death (77). Humour entails an affective distance between the one laughing and the object of the laughter. Humour thus seems at odds with sympathy even when it coexists with sympathy in Mirah’s rare laugh, and it can easily be cruel. We have seen, however, that sympathy also entails a rift between self and other, which it imaginatively tries to bridge, and can sometimes effectively widen. Humour is another *pharmakon* in *Daniel Deronda*, a healing poison, the corrective to a tyrannical sympathy. When Daniel objects to Hans’s portraits of Mirah, disguising mere possessiveness as an incoherent concern for Mirah’s public image and presuming to voice how Mirah would feel if she “saw the circumstances clearly,” Hans deflates the argument with “an explosive laugh” which, “seeing that Daniel looked gravely offended,” he redirects towards himself and the likelihood of his own paintings ever being exhibited (460). As Rosemarie Bodenheimer writes, “It is one of those moments that shows just how clearly George Eliot understood the self-interested functions of her own moralizing voice” (264).¹¹

From the excluded space of humour, and from whatever space he occupies while we are watching a newly-wed couple prepare to travel East, Hans launches a critique of Daniel that is a crucial part of *Daniel Deronda*. The artist “puts what he hates into a caricature,” Hans says, and though it would be overstating the case to say that Hans *hates* Daniel, he does put those of Daniel’s traits most inimical to him into a verbal caricature (461). Anticipating Daniel’s reaction

¹¹ Levine also notes that Daniel’s interest is a “driving force” in this scene, even though it is one of the novel’s “most solemn and truthful moments” (“*Daniel Deronda*: A New Epistemology” 57). Hans’s laugh, I suggest, exposes the interest at the expense of the solemnity.

to the letter he writes him, Hans includes a satirical “stage direction”: “While D. is reading, a profound scorn gathers in his face till at the last word he flings down the letter, grasps his coat-collar in a statuesque attitude and so remains with a look generally tremendous, throughout the following soliloquy, ‘O night, O blackness, &c. &c.’” (645-46). Daniel does tend to grab his coat-collar, as Henry James notes in his 1876 dialogue-review entitled “*Daniel Deronda*, a Conversation.” James’s character Pulcheria objects that Daniel is not a “real figure”: “why is he always grasping his coat-collar, as if he wished to hang himself up? The author had an uncomfortable feeling that she must make him do something real, something visible and sensible, and she hit upon that clumsy figure” (*Partial Portraits* 71). Eliot removed some instances of coat-collar grasping in the 1878 edition of the novel, perhaps to make Hans’s caricature more of a caricature and Daniel’s character less of one, but the fact remains that Hans and thus, in a sense, Eliot, share James’s observation. Hans’s dig at Daniel makes the collar clutching not just an awkward reality-effect but a significant mannerism, one associated with Daniel’s general *spoudaiotes*, which Hans seeks to mock.

A different passage in Hans’s letter is the cue for Cynthia Chase’s reading of *Daniel Deronda*, in which the letter “functions as a deconstruction of the novel” and “proposes an interpretation of the novel that is substantially and radically at odds with the explanations of its narrator” (215). This conflict is not merely between the narrator’s judgment and Hans’s, though Chase notes “the contrast between Meyrick’s frivolous, self-parodic tone and the narrator’s more sober style” and argues that, when the narrator judges Hans harshly, this judgment “reflects the fundamental strategy of the narrator and indicates one of the main ostensible meanings of the novel: seriousness and idealism triumph over parody and the ironic spirit” (215). More fundamentally, for Chase, Hans’s witticism about “the present causes of past effects” “offers a

deconstruction of the narrator's story and, by implication, of story in general—both of history, with its system of assumptions about teleological and representational structures, and of discourse, with its intrinsic need to constitute meaning through sequence and reference” (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 641; Chase 216). In short, Hans's phrase exposes how the narrative of *Daniel Deronda* really seems to work, so that Daniel's birth as a Jew is an *effect* of his alliance to Mordecai and Mirah in later life. That is, Hans's joke is at the expense of the “narrative as such” (219).

Chase's reading ultimately leads away from her earlier observations about Hans's character as Romantic ironist: “it can be misleading to think of the two readings [the authorized one and the deconstructive one] in personified or personifying terms, since they constitute a single discontinuous process that moves away from personification, abandoning the notion of the subject for the notion of linguistic operation, reconstruing the narrative's starting point as a text rather than as a subject” (225). Hans's quip points to an aporia in the narrative where we can see deconstruction happen, the system of signification undoing itself and taking Hans with it. I want to reinstate here, pragmatically, the personifying terms that deconstruction breaks down, to recognize but also to suspend the deconstructive logic of Hans's joke instead of pursuing it to an end in which the character Hans no longer exists as such. After all, it is typical of wise fools to pick at the threads of their textuality. More explicitly and self-consciously than Hans, the Fool in the Folio of *King Lear* deconstructs temporal sequence and exposes the groundlessness of the fiction in which he finds himself: “This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before his time” (Shakespeare 3.3.95-96).

It is significant that Hans writes his letter, that the utterance “present causes of past effects” belongs to his voice and way of thinking as they are constituted by the narrative. In the

person of Hans irony can be rejected and marginalized, but in the person of Hans and from the margins this subversive irony fights back in the novel's dialogue against the very earnestness that condemns him. Hans embodies a critical faculty in the text: it may be silly to speak of all things as a joke, but because Hans does speak of all things as a joke he teases out and gives voice to nagging problems in the novel. For instance, Hans identifies the vagueness in Mordecai's orations:

In fact, his mind seems so broad that I find my own correct opinions lying in it quite commodiously, and how they are to be brought into agreement with the vast remainder is his affair, not mine. I leave it to him to settle our basis, never yet having seen a basis which is not a world-supporting elephant, more or less powerful and expensive to keep. My means will not allow me to keep a private elephant. I go into mystery instead, as cheaper and more lasting—a sort of gas which is likely to be continually supplied by the decomposition of the elephants. (642)

The objection reveals Hans's wise-foolish conviction that "bases," by which he evidently means the fundamental systems of thought that relate individuals' "correct opinions" to each other and make them coherent, will inevitably collapse, and that the only tenable position is the oppositional non-position of an ironic mystery. This position may be of dubious intrinsic value, but its all-encompassing skepticism counters Mordecai's blithe attempts to dismiss problems with what Dawn Coleman calls his "sermonic voice": "Difficulties? I know there are difficulties. But let the spirit of sublime achievement move in the great among our people, and the work will begin" (535). These "difficulties" include the political challenges involved in creating a Jewish state amid what Mordecai lumps together as the "despotisms of the East" (535). Mordecai thus attempts to commit Daniel to a world-changing work that, as Edward Said has remarked from his

own committed position, remains largely unexamined in the novel (*The Question of Palestine* 65). Mordecai's "broad" mind is one obstacle to that examination. He is unable to descend to particulars: he can passionately and eloquently convey the need to act, but not how to act, and thus he remains at odds with his more pragmatic peers apart from Mirah and Daniel. As Coleman notes, even Daniel remains somewhat embarrassed about the mission he has undertaken, an embarrassment elicited by Hans's own embarrassed silence when Daniel tells him his intentions (417).

More than a voice of critique, Hans's is the voice of the comic form of *Daniel Deronda*, which is in dialogue with the exemplary form. After Mordecai consoles Mirah, who has encountered her dissolute father, by saying "It is because we children have inherited the good that we feel the evil. These things are wedded for us, as our father was wedded to our mother," the narrator endorses Mordecai's figurative use of the marriage metaphor:

The surroundings were of Brompton, but the voice might have come from a Rabbi transmitting the sentences of an elder time to be registered in *Babli*—by which (to our ears) affectionate-sounding diminutive is meant the voluminous Babylonian Talmud. "The Omnipresent," said a Rabbi, "is occupied in making marriages." The levity of the saying lies in the ear of him who hears it; for by marriages the speaker meant all the wondrous combinations of the universe whose issue makes our good and evil. (743)

Hans is, perhaps, the one with the light ear who, if he heard this saying, would think of wedlock and leave "the wondrous combinations of the universe" to the elephants; at least, he shows us what it would mean to be that person. In response to Hans's letter, in which Hans humorously personifies his "Hope" of Mirah's acceptance, Daniel thinks, "Already he is beginning to play at love: he is taking the whole affair as a comedy" (647). Love and comedy, of course, are not such

a novel combination. Hans does indeed take the whole affair as a comedy, in a generic sense, seeing his own plot moving towards marriage with Mirah and Daniel's towards marriage with Gwendolen. Hans tends to treat the ostensibly real life of the diegesis as if it were a play, which helps to account for the metafictional implications of his utterances, such as those Chase explores. Hans's cruelty in the face of Grandcourt's death can be seen in the rawest comic terms as Hans celebrating the removal, convenient to him, of a blocking character, a villainous heavy husband who stands in the way of the comic closure that Hans finds most fitting just as Casaubon and his will stand in the way of Dorothea's eventual marriage to Will.

In a very different kind of story than *Daniel Deronda*'s, Hans might have triumphed. He might not have been "the hinder wheel," doomed to run behind Daniel; he might have married Mirah and Daniel might have married Gwendolen (645). Perhaps, after some comic confusion, Hans might even have married Gwendolen while Daniel married Mirah. Perhaps Daniel might have been the *pharmakos*, rejected as a cross-gartered Malvolio. Hans's comic vision conjures these possibilities so that they can be rejected by the different sort of ending that does occur. The ending of *Daniel Deronda* combines the closure of Daniel and Mirah's marriage, the death of Mordecai, who bequeaths the couple his Zionist mission, and the routing of egoism in the persons of Hans and Gwendolen, suggesting the larger, graver, more diffuse sense of "marriage" that the narrator advocates.

Unlike the traditional comic ending, however, the ending of *Daniel Deronda* leaves Daniel and Mirah socially isolated. Though Daniel has theoretically embraced his membership in a Jewish community, he has inherited the eccentric position of Mordecai at the margins of that community as it is represented in the novel. It remains to Daniel not only to fill in the details of

Mordecai's notional plan, but to muster the support that Mordecai could not. Mordecai's project is not in itself eccentric, as William Baker notes:

Ideas in *Daniel Deronda* based mainly upon Mordecai's proposals for the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland, were not so fantastic as they may have seemed to Henry James and other Victorians. They were genuinely related to a movement for return amongst the diasporal Jews, to proposals and practical measures by the British Government to encourage Jewish settlement in Palestine, and to a measure of rejuvenation in the Palestine Jewish community itself. (134)

Eliot could have situated Mordecai's rhetoric and Daniel's departure within existing social discourses and networks, but she does not. To turn my reading of the novel thus far inside out, it is Daniel and Mirah who are being exiled to an unspecific East, they who possess an excess of earnest sympathy that does not belong in the "comic and banal" society of people like Hans, Gwendolen, and Sir Hugo as well as Lapidoth, the Cohen family, and Mordecai's club (Brown 308). The rhetoric of the narrative discourse positions us with Daniel and Mirah against this other world, but the mechanism of this rhetoric, the scapegoating of Hans and Gwendolen, is a hinge on which the whole structure can turn. If Hans is a Falstaff figure, then the late nineteenth-century England that Eliot presents in *Daniel Deronda* is Falstaff's England, not Hal's: a venal, fallen land of folly, egoism, and sometimes humour, where people suffer but also possess a kind of comic insight that seems unavailable to Daniel and Mirah. Hans voices the anti-systematic thesis of wise folly, that all the elephants of our thought are destined to decompose, and though this position can be rejected it cannot be unvoiced. Daniel must, therefore, pursue moral superiority in the face of these objections, and we are supplied a language, the language of the

pharmakos, a language foreign within the novel but not foreign to it, with which we might judge that he has not succeeded.

In *The Mill on the Floss*, “naughty” Bob Jakin performs a function similar to Hans’s. Like Hans, Bob is fundamentally different from the woman he admires (though, unlike Hans, Bob finds a better match in the course of the story), and this difference again has ethical significance (Eliot 51). The young Maggie Tulliver “felt sure that Bob was wicked, without very distinctly knowing why: unless it was because Bob’s mother was a dreadfully large fat woman, who lived at a queer round house down the river. . . . [A]ltogether, he was an irregular character, perhaps even slightly diabolical, judging from his intimacy with snakes and bats” (51-52). The narrator corrects Maggie slightly, but has faint praise for Bob:

For a person suspected of preternatural wickedness, Bob was really not so very villainous-looking; there was even something agreeable in his snub-nosed face, with its close-curved border of red hair. But then his trousers were always rolled up at the knee for the convenience of wading on the slightest notice, and his virtue, supposing it to exist, was undeniably ‘virtue in rags’ which, on the authority even of bilious philosophers, who think all well-dressed merit overpaid, is notoriously likely to remain unrecognised (perhaps because it is seen so seldom). (52)

Though the narrator also says Bob “was not utterly a sneak and a thief, as our friend Tom had hastily decided,” the narrator’s descriptions of Bob tend to set him apart from the protagonists (57). When the Tullivers are ruined and Maggie grieves that they must sell their books, we are told Bob looks on with the “pursuant gaze of an intelligent dumb animal” (252). The difference seems so fundamental that it nearly excludes Bob from the category of the human.

Bob is not “dumb,” however, and his difference, minus the hyperbole of the protagonists or the narrator, is primarily a difference of class: while Maggie and Tom Tulliver are the children of a miller, Bob’s father is not in evidence, his mother “gets a good penn’orth wi’ picking feathers an’ things,” and Bob himself grows from a bird-scarer and aspiring “rot-ketcher” into a packman (253). As Paul Sawyer observes, the class distinction between Bob and the young Tullivers is somewhat artificially underscored by a difference in speech: Bob speaks in orthographically marked dialect while Tom and Maggie speak the unmarked language of the narrator. The standardness of Tom and Maggie’s language may be partially explicable in terms of literacy, though while Maggie reads avidly, and even reads the dictionary, Tom doesn’t much like books. It is made fairly clear that Bob can’t read when he gives Maggie a gift of books, since he considers the ones with pictures “bettermost” compared to the ones that are “cram-full o’ print” (295). The dialect marking places Bob in a sharply different category from Maggie despite their both being of relatively low class, and, as Sawyer writes, the linguistic marking reinforces a difference in morality: “In Maggie’s responses to Bob, morality takes the idiom of genteel speech on a level with the narrator’s. When he offers to give a good ‘leathering’ to the person who has wronged her, she replies, ‘O, Bob, you’re a very good friend to me. But I shouldn’t like to punish anyone, even if they’d done me wrong. I’ve done wrong myself too often’” (Sawyer 67; Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 508). The word “leathering” belongs to a class lexicon and a moral lexicon that are uncouth from Maggie’s perspective and the narrator’s, while we are told Maggie’s “view of things was puzzling to Bob” (508). Maggie’s position of moral superiority as Bob’s “directing Madonna” is already naturalized in her superior status and speech (297).

Language in *The Mill on the Floss* works as it does in Shakespeare, as a marker not only of a character’s place in a social hierarchy but in multiple overlapping hierarchies, including

decorum, morality, class, and dramatic major- or minorness, which are not altogether congruent but together make up the distinction between “high” and “low.” Thus can Sir Toby Belch, the perpetually-drunken advocate of cakes and ale in *Twelfth Night*, be a prose-speaking low character despite also being a knight and the cousin of one of the verse-speaking nobles, the countess Olivia. Indeed, Sawyer compares Bob Jakin to the “Shakespearean fool,” who is absolutely low but is also a “semi-magical figure”: “As a trickster figure or vagrant who stands outside the Dodson world, Bob tweaks and outshines the Dodsons from below as the narrator fixes and appraises them from above; we might say then that he’s the narrator’s heterodox other, a voice that partially escapes the earnest narratorial regime” (67n.).

The narrator, who does not wear rags, can only treat Bob’s “virtue in rags” with condescension, but this condescension emphasizes the narrator’s lack of access to that virtue. Certainly the narrator cannot admire Bob’s ingenious dishonesty when he shortchanges his customers by measuring linen with his “big thumb” on the hither side of the yard. Yet in the chapter entitled “Aunt Glegg Learns the Breadth of Bob’s Thumb,” Bob’s big thumb becomes a metaphor for the charitable cunning with which he manipulates Mrs. Glegg simultaneously into buying muslin from him and lending money to Tom. Bob suggests there is an ethics to his cheating, though evidently a loose one: “I *am* a bit of a Do, you know, but it isn’t that sort o’ Do: it’s on’y when a feller’s a big rogue or a big flat, I like to let him in a bit, that’s all” (Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* 254). In other words, Bob ostensibly only cheats other cheaters and those who are easily cheated. It is a dubious scruple, but Bob’s logic is “There’s no law again’ flea-bites. If I wasn’t to take a fool in now and then, he’d niver get any wiser” (254). This logic doesn’t quite explain the old women who buy cloth from him, who are clearly none the wiser for his fooling them because they do not know he has done so, but Bob’s self-description as a biting flea serves

as a parody of Socrates that Bob himself could not intend, both minimizing Bob's importance and ascribing to him a corrective function.

This corrective function is demonstrable on the larger scale of the narrative, even though Bob's moral code is internally inconsistent and is alien to the narrator's. In Bob's first appearance he is a victim of the juvenile Tom's tyranny and thereby illuminates characteristics of Tom that remain relevant throughout the novel. The two boys discuss a hypothetical flood, foreshadowing the flood that ends the novel, and while Bob claims "I don't mind the water, no more nor the land. I'd swim—I would," Tom proposes to build a house-boat: "'And I'd take you in, if I saw you swimming,' he added, in the tone of a benevolent patron" (54). (The flood that does occur is, symbolically, an answer to Tom's pride, since Maggie must attempt to rescue Tom from his home, while Bob is safe in a boat. The flood is at the same time, as I suggested above, a natural disaster on a planet that doesn't care what happens at the end of humans' stories.) Tom's patronage turns less benevolent when Bob proposes a game of heads-and-tails with his own halfpenny. We do not know what Bob stands to win in this game, since he already owns the coin. We also do not know whether Bob cheats, but Tom declares that he does and tries to claim the prize. Tom threatens to "make" Bob give up the coin, says, "I'm master," and when Bob refuses initiates a fight (55). Because Eliot portrays Bob as a victim of Tom's bullying, which explicitly invokes Bob's inferior class status, that bullying both colludes with and calls into question the systematic demotion of Bob in the narrative.

Later Bob becomes a figure of unlimited generosity, offering his mite to Tom and Maggie when their family is ruined, giving Maggie books to replace those that were sold, and helping Tom to make money in trade. This generosity is significant because it is not and cannot be theorized in the narrator's language as Maggie's, Dorothea's, or Daniel's sympathy can be.

The books themselves underline this difference. To Bob they are just books, all equally valuable to him simply because books are valuable to Maggie, and the heterogeneous list seems to consist of whatever Bob “lighted on” at the book-stall (294). To Maggie, ironically, the specific selection of books becomes part of the ethical crisis that leads her to, as she says to Philip, “giv[e] up books, . . . except a very, very few” (317). Those few are the Bible and two of the books Bob has given her: *The Imitation of Christ* and *The Christian Year*. Reading Thomas à Kempis, Maggie embraces his brand of renunciation and turns against her brother’s schoolbooks, “the old books, Virgil, Euclid, and Aldrich—that wrinkled fruit of the tree of knowledge” through which she had pursued her “vain ambition to share the thoughts of the wise” (305). It is a violent shift: “In her first ardour, she flung away the books with a sort of triumph that she had risen above the need of them, and if they had been her own, she would have burned them, believing that she would never repent” (305). The narrator judges that she “threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self-renunciation,” and offers some gnomic correction: “That is the path we all like when we set out on our abandonment of egoism—the path of martyrdom and endurance, where the palm-branches grow, rather than the steep highway of tolerance, just allowance, and self-blame, where there are no leafy honours to be gathered and worn” (305). Are these the only options? Bob’s casual gift, free both of martyrdom and self-blame, is an argument that the endless road towards the “abandonment of egoism” need not be pursued along the two stringent paths that the narrator describes—or, perhaps, that virtue need not be formulated in terms of egoism at all.¹² Maggie’s

¹² Bob, whom we have seen compared to an “intelligent dumb animal,” thus recalls the dogs Adams discusses in *Adam Bede*, who help Eliot convey a “reality beyond words” (239). These dogs may be understood as *pharmakoi* by virtue of their categorical exclusion from the human and human language: indeed, my usage of the term “scapegoat” in this chapter encodes the slippage between sacrificed humans and sacrificed animals. Yet, while Bob’s illiteracy and dialect make him less eloquent than the narrator from the narrator’s point of view, he has a discourse of his own and is eloquent in his own way; he points, therefore, not beyond words but specifically beyond the narrator’s words.

ascetic rejection of all but the most pious books is a rejection of the spirit behind Bob's gift, by which he attempts merely to please her. Hans's humour, similarly, though it is egoistic, making no attempts to reach beyond his eccentric vision of the world, is generous in a way the narrator never articulates: Hans offers the gift of laughter; his audience may accept if they choose.

There are blind spots in the narrator's ethical vision, but through Bob's marginal position these blind spots can partially be represented through a kind of peripheral vision. When Bob half-heartedly offers to "leave off that trick wi' my big thumb," which Maggie disapproves of, and laments "what 'ud be the use o' havin' a big thumb? It might as well ha' been narrer," Maggie "laughed in spite of herself, at which her worshipper's blue eyes twinkled too" (297). Again, the *pharmakos* elicits laughter, and the phrase "in spite of herself" signals the logic of this laughter, which is provoked from Bob's outside position but draws Maggie briefly outside her own convictions and the circumscriptions of the narrator's ethical discourse. The *pharmakoi* provide us with views from outside the moral systems authorized by Eliot's narrators. The exclusion of these figures helps the narrators to construct the systems but also helps Eliot, the intention behind a larger aesthetic and ethical design, to trace the weaknesses and limits of these systems. By aligning themselves with certain characters against the *pharmakoi*, Eliot's narrators, in spite of themselves, represent their own positionality: they, too, are egoists, holding their candles before the pier-glass, shaping their accounts of each novel's imagined reality around their own values. The *pharmakoi* raise the possibility of shifting even these most central candles, resulting in radically different understandings of the human life Eliot depicts. The concluding section of this chapter will examine what the *pharmarkoi* reveal about the position of Eliot's narrators.

4. *Pharmakeus*

The metaphor of the pier glass, the image I have taken to be most emblematic of egoism in Eliot's work, conflicts with another optical metaphor in *Middlemarch*. Casaubon's egoism is figured not merely as a distortion of vision but as a blindness: "Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know no speck so troublesome as self" (Eliot, *Middlemarch* 419). Hertz judges this second metaphor to be the most characteristic of Eliot: "egotism in her writings is almost always rendered as narcissism, the self doubled and figured as both the eye and the blot" (20). Hertz prefers the term "egotism" or "narcissism"; I have been using "egoism." Eliot uses both "egoism" and "egotism," but uses "egotism" far less often. The two occurrences of the word in *Daniel Deronda* refer to Hans's "egotism in friendship," his tendency to confide in Daniel without thinking that Daniel might want to confide in him (Eliot 181). At any rate, egoism in Eliot encompasses the self-absorption of egotism, and associating each metaphor with a different term does not erase the tension between the metaphors. In one case, self causes vision to be selective, orders phenomena to create the illusion of the egoist's centrality; in the other, self is the object of vision and obstructs vision altogether except for a mere margin.

As J. Hillis Miller has observed, the totalizing metaphors of the narrator in *Middlemarch* are incommensurable with each other:

This incoherent, heterogeneous, "unreadable," or nonsynthesizable quality of the text of *Middlemarch* jeopardizes the narrator's effort of totalization. It suggests that one gets a different kind of totality depending on what metaphorical model is used. The presence of several incompatible models brings into the open the arbitrary and partial character of each and so ruins the claim of the narrator to

have a total, unified, and impartial vision. What is true for the characters of *Middlemarch*, that “we all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them” (chap. 10), must also be true for the narrator. The web of interpretative figures cast by the narrator over the characters of the story becomes a net in which the narrator himself is entangled and trapped, his sovereign vision blinded. (144)

Miller’s reading locates the deconstruction of metaphorical language within the intention of the work, attributing to Eliot herself a “recognition of the deconstructive powers of figurative language” (144). Miller’s reading, which is not itself strictly deconstructive, lends itself to the reconsideration of the realist narrator that I am undertaking in this dissertation: I am pressing Miller’s argument further, suggesting that the sovereignty and impartiality of the realist narrator’s vision are illusory to begin with. Realist authors need not have had deconstructive insight into the operation of language in order to design narrators with ambivalent narrative authority, since they already had the tradition of wise folly to draw from, a tradition which includes the Socratic irony that, under Derrida’s deft reading, yields the *pharmakon*. Eliot’s clashing metaphors, like Meredith’s uncertain gnomes, are a method of thrusting the narrator’s vision into the field of representation. If one entertains the possibility that the narrator, too, might be subject to the condition of egoism, then the two metaphors of egoism explain, in two different ways, the narrator’s position in the fiction. On the one hand, the narrator is a mediating device: if the fiction’s posited reality is the pier-glass, the narrator is the candle that shapes what we see into a narrative design. On the other hand, the narrator is all the narrator allows us to see; it is the speck close to our vision that blots out the world. To explain a metaphor of vision by means of Bakhtin’s metaphors of sound, which tend to be somewhat synaesthetic anyway, the narrator is

all we *hear*: the novel is the narrator's utterance—even the direct discourse of characters is conveyed as quotations within the narrator's discourse. Here I join in Hertz's play with the images "*blot*" and "*margin*," which he suggests cannot fully be separated from ink and paper even though Eliot uses them to describe an obstructed field of vision (21). The blot of the narrative discourse is the blot that we read between the margins of Eliot's page.

The two optical metaphors indicate the complex double function of the narrator, which Eliot uses both to tell a story from an ethically committed perspective while developing the ethics of that perspective, and to convey the possibility and importance of different perspectives, in all their fullness, without representing them fully. This duality in the narrator's function helps to explain the contradictions between narration and direct character discourse that Havely notes: conversations between Eliot's characters sometimes disprove what the narrator has told us about the characters. Although I am suggesting that direct character discourse is not "apparently narrator-free," but is quoted by the narrator, this discourse is the least affected by the narrator's egoism (Havely 304). For this reason the utterances of *pharmakoi*, including Hans's letter, are especially important to the narrator's second function, to the oblique tracing of the narrator's margin. It is fitting that Hans is a painter and a mimic because the representations of the world conveyed through his discourse compete with those of Eliot's narrator. Although Hans's Welsh surname signals his Britishness, and he stands in for the kind of middling British existence from which Daniel departs, his Germanic first name connects him to other continental, cosmopolitan artist figures in Eliot's work, including the musician Herr Klesmer in *Daniel Deronda* and the painter Adolf Naumann in *Middlemarch*. Because such artists occupy a different social sphere and hold substantially different values than many of Eliot's characters, they can perform to varying degrees the function of the *pharmakos*. Naumann's knowing description of Dorothea and

humorous twitting of Ladislav, as Havelly observes, paint a prurient image of Dorothea as the object of Ladislav's desire, an image that the narrative discourse holds at bay by insisting that Ladislav is innocent of designs on his uncle's wife.

Of course, at the end of the novel Ladislav and Dorothea marry despite these insistences, "For the resolution towards which the fiction always presses, though the author obscures this, is Dorothea's sexual fulfillment, not the resolution of her social commitment" (316-17). I would say the *narrator* obscures this comic dimension of the novel, since Eliot did after all write Naumann. Naumann, like Hans, voices the comic form of the narrative in which he finds himself. The narrator may depict Dorothea's marriage to Ladislav as a failure to achieve her moral potential, but underlying this evaluation is the conventional comic resolution of their plot. Fred Vincy creates discomfort because his subplot mirrors Dorothea and Ladislav's, minus the suggestion of high moral potential: it is disjunctive that Fred can bumble his way into gainful employment and a marriage that seems a happy fulfillment of his and Mary's desires (a happiness that, the narrator suggests, endures even at the time the story is being told), while Dorothea's marriage to Ladislav is shrouded in her family's disapproval, the narrator's irony, and her own sense of what might have been: "'It is quite true that I might be a wiser person, Celia,' said Dorothea, 'and that I might have done something better, if I had been better. But this is what I am going to do. I have promised to marry Mr. Ladislav; and I am going to marry him'" (Eliot, *Middlemarch* 821). Fred and Mary themselves turn out to be, ambiguously and collectively, writer figures: Fred writes a farming manual, and Mary writes a children's book based on stories from Plutarch. (The Middlemarchers are convinced that each really has authored the other's book.) Mary and Fred are *pharmakoi* only in that they are largely irrelevant to Dorothea's plot, which receives particular emphasis and which intersects with Lydgate and

Rosamond's plot. Mary and Fred do belong to the space of humour, however, especially Fred, whose laughter in the dairy at the elder and younger Cranch, family vultures awaiting Featherstone's death, makes the space of humour literal: "But no sooner did he [Fred] face the four eyes than he had to rush through the nearest door, which happened to lead to the dairy, and there under the high roof and among the pans he gave way to laughter which made a hollow resonance perfectly audible in the kitchen" (306). While the narrator concludes the novel by urging the importance of small heroisms like Dorothea's, "But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know," one may hear Fred, quite contentedly insignificant, laughing in the dairy (837).

A class of characters in Eliot—artists, writers, humourists, *pharmakoi*—represent the possibility of writing their reality differently than Eliot's narrators do. Even Bob, who is illiterate and speaks dialect, is a con artist with an energetic verbal and moral inventiveness quite distinct from the narrator's. Casaubon, too, represents the possibility of writing differently, but Casaubon is atypical in his lack of humour, in which he far exceeds Eliot's narrators. Casaubon's erudition and his aspirations to a synthetic understanding of mythology suggest a character that is more similar to Eliot's narrators than any of the other artist figures are, but Casaubon gets wrong what Eliot's narrators try to get right. Casaubon's research is incomplete; he is unable to translate the research into the synoptic work he imagines, managing only minor monographs; and he does not practise sympathy, possessing instead merely "that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egoistic scrupulosity" (279). Hertz has noted that the "recognition and exorcism of Casaubon" are rooted in a similarity between his task and the

novelist's (41). To reject Casaubon is not just to reject narcissism, but to reject the narcissism of research and writing (32).

Treated as other to the narrator and rejected, the humourist, artist, or pedant is akin to the narrator. The narrator of *Adam Bede* opens the first chapter: "With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr. Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799" (Eliot 5).¹³ The narrator's mirror of ink combines the contradictory metaphors of egoism: the pier-glass and the blot. This image of the narrator as a sorcerer who both reflects and writes reality recalls Derrida's term "*pharmakeus*." The *pharmakeus* is magician and druggist: "The illusionist, the technician of sleight-of-hand, the painter, the writer" (Derrida 140). The *pharmakeus* is the narrator, the source of the narrative and of the ethical prescriptions that are inseparable from it. But the *pharmakeus* is semantically linked to the *pharmakos*; the *pharmakos*, too, is "wizard, magician, poisoner," "a synonym of *pharmakeus* . . . , but with the unique feature of having been overdetermined, overlaid by Greek culture with another function" (130). The *pharmakos* is a potential narrator, a *pharmakeus* cast out to the margins of the fiction instead of situated at the centre.

The continuities I have been tracing between figures like Hans and Naumann, Casaubon, and Eliot's narrators become especially clear in Eliot's last work, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*. This collection of essays is a Menippean satire, not a realist novel, but the essays are delivered in the first person by a persona who unstably combines features of the *pharmakos* and

¹³ Hertz glosses this sorcerer as Abd-El-Kadir El-Maghrabee, and compares Eliot's invocation of this sorcerer's mirror to Borges's in "The Mirror of Ink" (98-99).

pharmakeus. The Menippean character of this work brings its wise folly closer to the surface, and while the work is generically different from everything else Eliot wrote, it makes starkly visible the concerns I have been tracing in Eliot's fiction. Theophrastus Such is an extreme type of the comic pedant. He is dyspeptic, unproductive (his only publication being a "humorous romance" successful only in a Cherokee translation), and physically made for mockery, just as Hans is made for mishaps:

This sort of distinction, as a writer nobody is likely to have read, can hardly counteract an indistinctness in my articulation, which the best-intentioned loudness will not remedy. Then, in some quarters my awkward feet are against me, the length of my upper lip, and an inveterate way I have of walking with my head foremost and my chin projecting. One can become only too well aware of such things by looking in the glass, or in that other mirror held up to nature in the frank opinions of street-boys, or of our Free People travelling by excursion train.
(Eliot, *Impressions* 14-15)

Theophrastus is also sexually unsuccessful, pining in secret for a woman who does not recognize him, which recalls the combination of sexual and authorial impotence that characterizes Chaucer's self-representation in *The House of Fame*. Theophrastus is not a misanthrope, but he feels himself an outcast: "Though continually in society, and caring about the joys and sorrows of my neighbours, I feel myself, so far as my personal lot is concerned, uncared for and alone" (14). Theophrastus's personal disadvantages make him into an anti-authority, who discredits any argument he advances: "I have now and then done harm to a good cause by speaking for it in public, and have discovered too late that my attitude on the occasion would more suitably have been that of negative beneficence. Is it really to the advantage of an opinion that I should be

known to hold it?” (15-16). Theophrastus takes up the position of a writer writing for no-one in particular, an audience he cannot and does not wish to imagine too clearly: “The haze is a necessary condition” (22).

As a *pharmakos* become the *pharmakeus* within his work, Theophrastus theorizes his own marginality. His initial reaction to his misfortune is the “the idea of compensation; trying to believe that I was all the wiser for my bruised vanity, that I had the higher place in the true spiritual scale, and even that a day might come when some visible triumph would place me in the French heaven of having the laughs on my side” (16). These “consolations of egoism” do not endure, Theophrastus being too socially-minded to believe the success of his friends and his own lack of success are entirely undeserved (18). Theophrastus, extending the optical imagery characteristic of Eliot, imagines his egoism as a disease or aberration of vision:

In certain branches of science we can ascertain our personal equation, the measure of difference between our own judgments and an average standard: may there not be some corresponding correction of our personal partialities in moral theorising? If a squint or other ocular defect disturbs my vision, I can get instructed in the fact, be made aware that my condition is abnormal, and either through spectacles or diligent imagination I can learn the average appearance of things: is there no remedy or corrective for that inward squint which consists in a dissatisfied egoism or other want of mental balance? (17)

The phrase “dissatisfied egoism” underscores that curing egoism altogether is out of the question: the best human vision is imperfect. The error function, spectacles, imagination—each of these is a *pharmakon*, a corrective to some kind of distortion, but of course there are no spectacles that correct the self, just as there is no error function for human folly. Imagination is

the only remedy that applies equally to sight and to egoism. As we have seen, sympathy is an imagining of the other that tries to correct the condition of egoism but can only supplement it. The spectacles of imagination can easily err: “Whether we look through the rose-coloured glass or the indigo, we are equally far from the hues which the healthy human eye beholds in heaven above and earth below” (18). Theophrastus’s description of “healthy” sight, which the condition of egoism makes elusive, echoes Meredith’s “philosophy,” which navigates a middle path between the “rose-pink” and the “dirty drab”: “Philosophy bids us to see that we are not so pretty as rose-pink, not so repulsive as dirty drab; and that instead of everlastingly shifting those barren aspects, the sight of ourselves is wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight” (Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways* 15). For Meredith, as I suggested in Chapter Two, realist representation emerges from philosophy of this sort and entails balancing individual insight with social consciousness. Theophrastus’s “philosophic estimation of the human lot in general” similarly requires care lest it become “a mere prose lyric expressing my own pain and consequent bad temper” (Eliot, *Impressions* 18).

In its broad outlines, Theophrastus’s self-prostrating first essay, “Looking Inward,” accomplishes the inward turn that distinguishes the attitude of wise folly from misanthropy: “Thus I make myself a charter to write, and keep the pleasing, inspiring illusion of being listened to, though I may sometimes write about myself. What I have already said on this too familiar theme has been meant only as a preface, to show that in noting the weaknesses of my acquaintances I am conscious of my fellowship with them” (23). By including himself in the critique, and acknowledging his fellowship with the satirical figures who populate several of the subsequent essays, Theophrastus appears to establish the conventional mood of wise-foolish critique: one expects a good-humoured ribbing about human failings, designed neither to

condemn nor to exonerate, but to explore what it would mean to take folly as the human condition and to find value in the human anyway. Indeed, many of the satirical sketches, in the style of the real Theophrastus of Eresos, fit this mold. “How We Encourage Research” is an echo of Casaubon’s plot translated across genres. Like Casaubon and Lydgate, the researcher Merman is also interested in fundamental theories, including “the ultimate reduction of all the so-called elementary substances,” and “the possible connection of certain symbolic monuments common to widely scattered races” (50, 51). Merman publishes, taking aim in particular at the views of the established scholar Grampus on the “Magicodumbras” and the “Zuzumotzis.” When Grampus publishes his refutation, Merman is universally ridiculed. Eventually Grampus changes his position and plagiarizes Merman’s ideas, which, when presented as Grampus’s, are met with acclaim. Merman’s career never recovers. The names in this essay are an encyclopedia of marine biology, marking the characters as the humorous types conventional in Menippean satire: aside from Grampus himself, other “Cetaceans” include Lord Narwhal, Professor Sperm N. Whale, Butzkopf (Bottlehead), Dugong, and M. Cachalot. This image of the intellectual sphere as an ocean, reminiscent of *Moby-Dick*, where the sea of thought is similarly perilous and humorous, lurks behind even the seriousness of *Middlemarch*, in which Casaubon’s peers include Carp, Pike, and Tench (281). (Grampus makes an early appearance as a Colonial Governor with whom Sir James wishes to employ Ladislav [485].)

Despite the attitude of some of these sketches, Theophrastus is uncertain in his position as wise fool. Though he critiques himself, he is uncomfortable with what he finds to critique: “Dear blunderers, I am one of you. I wince at the fact, but I am not ignorant of it, that I too am laughable on unsuspected occasions; nay, in the very tempest and whirlwind of my anger, I include myself under my own indignation. If the human race has a bad reputation, I perceive that

I cannot escape being compromised” (*Impressions* 11). Theophrastus is also anxious about the egoism that wise folly accepts as inevitable and the techniques of satire through which wise folly expresses itself. He distinguishes between a good laughter and a bad: “That a gratified sense of superiority is at the root of barbarous laughter may be at least half the truth. But there is a loving laughter in which the only recognised superiority is that of the ideal self, the God within, holding the mirror and the scourge for our own pettiness as well as our neighbours” (23-24). The distinction appears to depend on self-criticism, without which wise folly would be mere misanthropy or self-righteousness. But Theophrastus’s wise folly is unusual in its underlying earnestness, its insistence on the “God within” and the wielding of the scourge against oneself in service of that god. Wise folly as an intellectual or dialogical performance maintains a distance between the role and the one who plays it. Theophrastus, on the other hand, is a thoroughgoing ascetic, verging on a masochist. He likes the scourge, and he wants the privilege of using it on himself: “Though not averse to finding fault with myself, and conscious of deserving lashes, I like to keep the scourge in my own discriminating hand” (13). This admission rejects the neighbourly scourging that Theophrastus’s image of “loving laughter” entails—though Theophrastus will scourge his neighbours, he prefers not to be scourged by them. Theophrastus also prefers his own mirror, decrying “the sadly confused inference of the monotonous jester that he is establishing his superiority over every less facetious person, and over every topic on which he is ignorant or insensible, by being uneasy until he has distorted it in the small cracked mirror which he carries about with him as a joking apparatus” (140). This latter remark appears in “Debasing the Moral Currency,” an essay which troubles the satire of many of the preceding sketches by diagnosing rampant humour, parody, and burlesque as a social disease.

Given that Theophrastus acknowledges the distortions of his egoism—his “inward squint”—as well as the distortions of the jester’s “small cracked mirror,” his confidence in the accuracy of his own mirror seems difficult to justify except as a symptom of the squint. Certainly, Theophrastus wants to discriminate between right and wrong objects of humour: “The world seems well supplied to me with what is genuinely ridiculous: wit and humour may play as harmlessly or beneficently round the changing facets of egoism, absurdity, and vice, as the sunshine over the rippling sea or the dewy meadows”; at the same time, “a greedy buffoonery debase[s] all historic beauty, majesty, and pathos, and the more you heap up the desecrated symbols the greater will be the lack of the ennobling emotions which subdue the tyranny of suffering, and make ambition one with social virtue” (142, 143). Yet the grounds for distinguishing between the “genuinely ridiculous” and that which is merely made ridiculous by “greedy buffoonery” are unclear, especially since egoism, as we have seen, is ubiquitous in Eliot. Short on examples, Theophrastus hauls out two cultural touchstones, Shakespeare and Plato, whose work ought to be revered but is instead burlesqued, “the finest images being degraded and the finest words of genius being poisoned as if with some befooling drug” (144). The example of Plato reveals part of the problem with Theophrastus’s rant:

And doubtless if she [Theophrastus’s acquaintance Clarissa] were to take her boys to see a burlesque Socrates, with swollen legs, dying in the utterance of cockney puns, and were to hang up a sketch of this comic scene among their bedroom prints, she would think this preparation not at all to the prejudice of their emotions on hearing their tutor read that narrative of the *Apology* which has been consecrated by the reverent gratitude of ages” (145).

In arguing that parodies of Socrates will compromise the reverence of the youth, Theophrastus does not realize that he is siding with the opponents of Socrates, advocating the hemlock in place of the “befooling drug.” (Or maybe he does realize this—he has already told us that he can serve an argument best through “negative beneficence.”) *The Apology* tells how Socrates was killed for teaching the youth of Athens to question, and the tradition of a carnivalesque Socrates represents the clownishness that made his method possible.

Theophrastus’s essay engages in a conflict between seriousness and humour that plays out in Eliot’s novels. The narrators of these novels share Theophrastus’s learning, his earnestness, and his critical position as an outsider and observer. Describing Tryan in “Janet’s Repentance,” the narrator says, “any one looking at him with the bird’s-eye glance of a critic might perhaps say that he made the mistake of identifying Christianity with a too narrow doctrinal system . . . But I am not poised at that lofty height. I am on the level and in the press with him, as he struggles his way along the stony road, through the crowd of unloving fellow-men” (*Scenes of Clerical Life* 229). This protestation only makes clearer the extent to which Eliot’s narrators habitually occupy the “lofty height” of analysis and can only be “on the level and in the press” with characters through sympathetic narration that temporarily declines the bird’s-eye view. In *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Eliot directly explores the limitations of her narrative discourse through the character of Theophrastus. In her novels, she represents these limitations through the narrative devices of the *pharmakeus* and the *pharmakos*.

The dialogue between *pharmakeus* and *pharmakos* is always asymmetrical, like the dialogue between sovereign and fool. Together the two figures do not represent all possible points of view: this pairing is not a means for Eliot to represent the imagined reality synoptically, and the views do not synthesize dialectically into a unified vision that can be called Eliot’s. The

pharmakeus allows Eliot to infuse her novels with the sweeping ethical vision that is indispensable to her art, while the *pharmakos* allows the novels to encompass more than that vision, so that a reader may reject the ethics of the *pharmakeus* while still finding the ethical dialogue of the novel valuable and instructive. A reader may be alarmed, for example, at the seriousness of characters like Daniel and Mirah, a seriousness which partakes of Theophrastus's asceticism. In *Romola* this asceticism is embodied in the Bonfire of Vanities, "the new Carnival, which was a sort of sacred parody of the old," in which the supporters of Savonarola burn objects they consider conducive to sin, including *The Decameron* (419). Romola admits she enjoys Boccaccio, but she defends the Bonfire to the painter Piero di Cosimo in language that resembles Mirah's and Theophrastus's: "There are some things in them [Boccaccio's stories] I do not want ever to forget, . . . but you must confess, Piero, that a great many of those stories are only about low deceit for the lowest ends. Men do not want books to make them think lightly of vice, as if life were a vulgar joke. And I cannot blame Fra Girolamo for teaching that we owe our time to something better" (422). Piero's objection, I think, is sound: "'Yes, yes, it's very well to say so now you've read them,' said Piero, bitterly, turning on his heel and walking away from her" (422). The narrator, *pharmakeus*, does not entirely share Romola's feelings, but also does not share Piero's anger and, on balance, thinks the good Savonarola inspires is worth the cost: "Sorrow and joy have each their peculiar narrowness; and a religious enthusiasm like Savonarola's which ultimately blesses mankind by giving the soul a strong propulsion towards sympathy with pain, indignation against wrong, and the subjugation of sensual desire, must always incur the reproach of a great negation" (422). By walking away, Piero, *pharmakos*, a minor character and a sensual painter aligned with the vanity on the bonfire, exits to the margins of the fiction, and it falls to the narrator to rationalize the loss.

Chapter Four

Learning We Are Fools

Education, *n.* That which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding. (Bierce, "Education")

Quotation, *n.* The act of repeating erroneously the words of another. The words erroneously repeated.

Intent on making his quotation truer,
He sought the page infallible of Brewer,
Then made a solemn vow that he would be
Condemned eternally. Ah, me, ah, me!

Stumpo Gaker. ("Quotation")

1. "Under Which King, Bezonian?"

The progression from Chapter Two to Chapter Three of this study constitutes an expanding scope, locating wise folly first in the attitude of George Meredith's narrators and then in the relationship between George Eliot's narrators and the characters they narrate. This chapter will extend that movement outwards from the narrative discourse, continuing to consider narrators and characters while examining the spaces where realist novels intersect with other texts. The practices of wise folly rely on intertextuality. We have seen that the aphorism or, more generally, the gnome, is a quotational speech genre, designed to simulate the words of another even when spoken by its author: thus can the gnome claim to present social wisdom in a condensed utterance. Aware of the trickery involved in this claim, Meredith's narrators craft

gnomes artfully while troubling their own pretensions to wisdom. In George Eliot's novels, I have argued, minor characters whose values and ways of seeing and speaking are rejected, the *pharmakoi*, make available other ethical and generic interpretations of Eliot's stories by representing the possibility of judging the imagined reality differently.

Julia Kristeva's term "intertextuality" is rooted in her reading of Bakhtin, and Bakhtin's dialogic conception of language helps to explain why intertextuality is necessary to wise folly and realism. The realist novel is characterized by a particular kind of dialogism, which operates, counterintuitively but not contradictorily, through the overt mediation of the intrusive realist narrator. British realism aims to present wisdom about the novel's imagined reality and to analogize that reality to the reader's, while deploying the techniques of wise folly to make the narrator's wisdom contingent, to situate that wisdom among various follies that, seen from different points of view, could actually constitute wisdom. Different discourses, such as the discourses of minor characters, are one means of evoking these points of view; as Bakhtin explains, discourses imply perspectives. Recognizing that wise folly operates intertextually in the realist novel, this chapter will examine one way in which intertextuality is represented and thematized in novels by Walter Scott and George Meredith, especially *Waverley* and *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*: quotation, including epigraphs and incorporated verse. In addition to the interplay of utterances in "intonational" quotation marks that constitutes the general intertextual and dialogic fabric of a novel, I will be discussing in particular the *written* quotation marks of Scott and Meredith's novels and the bearing of what lies between them on what lies outside them (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 44). Quotation and education are linked in the novel, where a character's repertoire of literary, biblical, or folk quotations are an index of the character's education and a means of characterization. In a novel that thematizes the literary education of its

hero, such as *Waverley* or *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, quotations indicate the networks of discourses that influence the hero's, among which—and through which—he learns to fashion his own. Quotation is also a way for these novels to examine their own pedagogical effects: Edward Waverley and Richard Feverel are analogous to their readers *as* readers, and by representing the young heroes' encounters with "miscellaneous snatches and fragments" of text, Scott and Meredith imagine the role of reading in education, including its value and its dangers (Scott 58). Quotation, I will argue, is dialogically desultory, and turns out to be implicated in the folly of desultory literary education in Scott and Meredith. Employing the logic of wise folly, these novels treat wisdom not as an alternative to this folly, but as an uncertain goal that can only be approached by wading deeper into folly, by creating tissues of disconnected quotations.

In a dialogic view of discourse in the novel, explicit quotation of discourses other than the narrator's occupies one extreme of a spectrum, with the discourse of the narrator at the other end and the various shades of hybridized or double-voiced discourse in between. Because the middle range involves the narrator's implicit quotation of others, quotation marks and other typographical markers of quotation, such as indentation, indicate not merely the act of quoting, which is nearly ubiquitous, but specifically a high "degree of otherness and purity in another's word," measured "as per the intention of the speaker himself, how he himself determines this degree of otherness" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 339). At every point on this spectrum, the narrator is the primary fictional speaker. As I claimed in the previous chapter, even the direct discourse of characters is mediated by the narrator's discourse, which quotes the characters'. Bakhtin's qualification "as per the intention of the speaker himself" implies that quotation marks communicate to the reader the narrator's judgment about the quotation: the narrator uses quotation marks to contain otherness of speech and designate it as other. That otherness might

have been incorporated to a greater degree and less obtrusively into the narrator's speech through indirect quotational methods, such as free indirect discourse, but has not been. In her study of practices of quoting, social scientist Ruth Finnegan also claims that quotation expresses the quoter's sense of the status of the quoted speech:

Anyone who repeats the words of others, whether as writer, speaker, or broadcaster, cannot avoid letting their own voice come through and may even make a point of doing so. It becomes a matter of reconstruction and recontextualization rather than of precise repetition, where the new user of the words, whether overtly or implicitly, is communicating a particular attitude to the words or to their original speaker in this new enactment, manipulating the audience's interpretation. (104)

Quotation marks help to make the speaker's attitude overt. Quotation marks are also the narrator's guarantee of minimal mediation, though the otherness and purity of the quoted discourse are not absolute, and certain kinds of interference are conventionally acceptable. When Eliot renders dialect in orthographically marked language and Rudyard Kipling renders non-English speech in English with a smattering of untranslated words, these mediations are designed to render intelligible to the reader both the otherness and the meaning of the quoted speech. Misquotation of real sources is also possible, and quite common when authors quote from memory, as Scott often does. Sometimes, as Finnegan notes, authors will enclose indirect discourse or forms of summary in quotation marks as if it they were direct discourse; Austen does this, the most extreme example being the chatter about strawberries in *Emma* (Finnegan 106). Such exceptions all display recognizable cues, however. One does not suspect without such evidence that a nineteenth-century realist narrator is tampering with the language in direct

quotations, unlike the content of free indirect discourse, in which the degree of the narrator's interference is often impossible to determine and can be assessed only through the reader's acquired sense of the voices involved.

In avowing the otherness of discourses in direct quotation, the narrator confers on them an exceptional status that resembles the status of the *pharmakos* figure I examined in Chapter Three: direct quotations are incorporated into the text but kept apart and designated alien. Although common in the novel, direct dialogue between characters imports dramatic norms and interrupts narrative norms, which are better served by indirect and free indirect discourse. Direct quotations are also a means of introducing lyric or fragments of other prose genres into narrative. Quotation marks indicate intertextual seams. Thus, as we have seen, direct quotations of the distinctive speech of *pharmakoi* such as Hans Meyrick, Bob Jakin, or Adolph Naumann, especially the extended quotation of Hans's discourse in his letter to Daniel, are crucial to Eliot's representation of these figures of ethical otherness whose views engage in an asymmetrical conflict with the views of Eliot's narrators. Perhaps because the space of a quotation is that of a licensed and potentially subversive otherness, of discourse simultaneously appropriated and disavowed, quotations are a conventional instrument of wise fool characters, including court jesters. (The fool is a type of *pharmakos*—the *pharmakos* is not always a fool.) The fool is allowed at court by the authority of the sovereign, who exempts the fool from ordinary rules of speech and decorum, allowing the fool to speak relatively freely, but only under the understanding that what the fool says is, by definition, foolish. If the fool also functions as advisor, this function is enabled by the logic of wise folly, which, provisionally entertained by the fool and his listeners, permits the fool's advice to be recognized as wisdom while still designated folly or nonsense. The fool's role is not inherently either conservative or radical, but

has the potential to be both, either restricting or enabling subversive speech depending on the context and the audience. Quotation shares this ambivalent potential.

In drama, the fool can be an intertextual portal, a conduit of aphorism and poetry—of “nonsense, or poetry, or the dash between the two,” as Meredith’s narrator says of Sir Austin’s monomaniacal oracles (*Feverel* 112). The fool quotes sources and sometimes fabricates them in order to play with authority. Typographical markers of quotation do not have the importance in drama that they do in narrative, since they cannot be heard: fools signal quotation explicitly by tagging their quotations verbally or shifting the form of their speech into song or rhyme. The fool’s quotations have several functions. They contribute to the posture of wise folly by fragmenting the fool’s speech and diffusing its authorship. Lear’s Fool uses song and rhyme extensively to create a texture of seemingly nonsensical speech, fragments of which the audience must interpret, reconcile with each other, and apply with some ingenuity to the context in which they are uttered, if they desire to extract a coherent critique of Lear. Touchstone does not quote frequently, but when he utters his version of the premise of wise folly, he quotes it: “I do now remember a saying: ‘The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool’” (Shakespeare, *As You Like It* 5.1.29-31). This “saying” displaces the origins of the logic of wise folly into an unspecified past, rendering Touchstone the performer and not the author of his role. The fool’s quotations can also parody the practice of quoting authorities. One reason to mark a discourse using explicit quotation is to preserve the authority of another’s speech. When Feste utters an epigram advocating wise folly, he attributes it to a spurious authority: “For what says Quinapalus? ‘Better a witty fool than a foolish wit’” (*Twelfth Night* 1.5.32-33). As the director Terry Hands noticed, “Quinapalus” is suggestive of *qui n’a pas lu* (who has not read) (1.5.32n.). Neither Feste nor anyone else has read Quinapalus, of course, because he does not exist, but

perhaps Feste is also insinuating that invoking authorities through detachable gnomic quotations does not necessitate reading the authorities. More drastically, when Lear's Fool attributes his prophecy to Merlin, Shakespeare makes a joke at the expense of the drama itself: the Fool references the period in which he is supposed to live by attributing his speech to a *later* source that playwright, players, and audience can know but he himself cannot. Realist novelists draw on these dramatic uses of quotation, with the difference that quotation in the novel always represents an intrusion into the narrative discourse. Though fool characters may continue to be vehicles of quotation in the realist novel, and there are characters in Scott and Meredith who perform this function, quotation is in itself a mechanism of wise folly in the novel.

Quotation is necessarily a messy process. Not only does a direct quotation become ambiguously part of and distinct from the narrator's utterance, attenuating the narrative discourse, a quotation also interrupts some other utterance, the utterance of the quoted source. For Bakhtin, the utterance, the unit of speech communication, is also the unit of intention and meaning. Every utterance has a "speech plan" or "speech will," which the listener or reader gauges continually while hearing or reading the utterance: "In each utterance—from the single-word, everyday rejoinder to large, complex works of science or literature—we embrace, understand, and sense the speaker's *speech plan* or *speech will*, which determines the entire utterance, its length and boundaries. We imagine to ourselves what the speaker *wishes* to say. And we also use this speech plan, this speech will (as we understand it), to measure the finalization of the utterance" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 77).¹ The utterance is only fully finalized when there is a change of speaker, when it is someone else's turn to respond. This response may be another utterance or an action. In conversation, for example, the question "How are you?" is finalized as an utterance when the speaker pauses and the responder, understanding what is asked, becomes the next

¹ Italics are Bakhtin's unless otherwise indicated.

speaker and begins to say how he or she is. If a pedestrian reads the sign, “Do not walk on the grass,” on the other hand, his or her response will probably not be a communication to the sign’s author but an action, walking or not walking on the grass. (Viewed dialogically, walking on the grass after having read and understood the sign means something different than walking on the grass without having read the sign.) The listener or reader’s response, finally, need not be communicative at all: it may be intellectual or emotional, what Bakhtin calls “active responsive understanding” (71). If one reads that the unexamined life is not worth living, one’s response may simply be silently to agree or disagree. All of these examples are of successfully finalized utterances, which are the only utterances that Bakhtin considers in his discussion of speech plans. Because the listener’s judgment of the speaker’s speech plan is ongoing, however, the listener may prematurely finalize the utterance by interrupting it. “I’m fine, thank you” is not an appropriate response to “How are you” if the speaker was going to finish, “getting to the theatre?” This exchange would be a relatively simple case of misunderstanding.

When utterances are larger and more complex, interruption becomes qualitatively different and inescapable. A novel-length realist narrative is a long and complex utterance. Applying the concept of the speech plan to the novel yields something very much like an implied author or a similar fiction that permits the reader to apprehend the meaning of a work as a whole. Bakhtin recognizes that this kind of finalization, like that of a scientific work, is less final than that of a simple conversational utterance:

Here one can speak only of a certain minimum of finalization making it possible to occupy a responsive position. We do not objectively exhaust the subject, but, by becoming the *theme* of the utterance (i.e., of a scientific work) the subject achieves a relative finalization under certain conditions, when the problem is

posed in a particular way, on the basis of particular material, with particular aims set by the author, that is, already within the boundaries of a *specific authorial intent*. (77)

The phrase “*specific authorial intent*” looks like a reference to explicitly stated intent, especially paired with the phrase “particular aims set by the author,” but Bakhtin is taking the example of a scientific study, in which it is conventional to state one’s aims as clearly and accurately as possible. Seeing the intention behind a “problem [being] posed in a particular way” requires a greater degree of interpretation and reminds us that the speech plan of an utterance is ultimately the construction of its listener. In my own acts of finalization, of reading novels as intentional wholes, I have been using the term “design,” which I owe to Jonathan Loesberg’s version of Kantian aesthetics. Loesberg describes how a reader may hypothesize intention for the purposes of understanding a work without positing the real intention of the artist, and Bakhtin’s concept of the speech plan suggests why such a hypothesis is important to communication, even artistic communication.

Bakhtin’s greatest insight into the novel, however, is that it is formally dialogic and resists finalization even more than other creative works do. Even though the novel is a single utterance, it contains other utterances that interact with each other, so that the reader’s responsive understanding of the novel depends on sorting through the dialogue between the discourses organized within it. In other words, the reader can only develop a sense of the novel as whole utterance by hypothesizing the roles that various interacting speech plans play within the overarching speech plan of the novel. Because novels are long, moreover, readers’ provisional responses throughout the act of reading become more important than a single, final response: although one surely understands a novel much better after finishing it, it would be incredible to

claim that the reader only truly responds to the novel, takes his or her turn in the dialogue, after the last page is read. The reader puts the book down, picks it up, forgets, remembers. Barthes proposes *tnesis*, “source and figure of pleasure,” the insertion of words into the middle of a semantic unit (“abso-bloody-lutely!”), as a figure of readerly reading:

Yet the most classical narrative (a novel by Zola or Balzac or Dickens or Tolstoy) bears within it a sort of diluted *tnesis*: we do not read everything with the same intensity of reading; a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the *integrity* of the text; our very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or to skip certain passages (anticipated as “boring”) in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote (which are always its articulations: whatever furthers the solution of the riddle, the revelation of fate): we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations. (*The Pleasure of the Text*, 11)

Although in this project I am making a case for the pleasures and value of a more sustained engagement with the forms of realist novels, Barthes does identify a plausible consequence of the duration and leisureliness of nineteenth-century novel reading. Bakhtin’s framework, in contrast, seems to leave little room for the unfinished work, unfinished either by the reader or the author. The ending of *Tristram Shandy* can easily be incorporated into the novel’s design—it is a novel about writing one’s life, and the ending of the novel is simply the ending of Tristram’s (and Sterne’s) ability to continue writing it; but not every unfinished work is so appropriately unfinished.

Direct quotations *unfinish* the work being quoted. They reduce the total utterance of a work to a fragment that is presented as an utterance in its own right. The speech plan of the

utterance in quotation marks bears an uncertain relationship to the speech plans or designs of the work from which it originated and the work into which it has been introduced. Like the speech of the fool, which is simultaneously sense and nonsense, direct quotation makes especially difficult the reader's task of measuring the utterance against its context to decide which meanings are pertinent and which are not. This problem is a version of the problem raised by any kind of allusion or trope—where is the bottom of the rabbit hole?—but is further complicated by the distance between the new speaker and the old one that the act of explicit quotation enforces. C. M. Jackson-Houlston organizes Scott's allusions to folk songs into four categories of propriety: "simple display," "allusion which seems to imply audience recognition of common material," "the ingenious selection of unlikely quotation for its local verbal propriety," and "selection for significant intertextual propriety" (33). The first two of these categories distinguish whether Scott is alluding for the sake of alluding or seems to expect his reader to catch the allusion; the second two distinguish the degree and kind of propriety. These categories are equally applicable to Scott's direct quotations of various sources, including folk songs, and the third category—pertinently impertinent quotation—is especially relevant to this discussion of the follies of quotation.

In some cases the impropriety of a direct quotation can be recovered as part of the meaning of the quotation, and therefore part of the design of the quoting text. The title page of each volume of the first edition of *Waverley* displays the following epigraph:

Under which King, Bezonian? speak, or die!

Henry IV. Part II.

The explicit attribution of the epigraph and its location at the centre of the title page, set between horizontal lines, perform the work of quotation marks. Above the epigraph, on four lines, are the

words “WAVERLEY; OR, ’TIS SIXTY YEARS SINCE. IN THREE VOLUMES.” Below the epigraph are the volume number and the publication information. Shakespeare’s words are the only ones on the title page that appear neither in italics nor the upper case. Typographically resembling the text of inset quotations within the novel more than the varied type of the title page, the epigraph remains a fragment from the body of one work even while it helps to frame the other. This epigraph is significant because, as paratext, it shapes the reader’s expectations of the novel’s design—its speech plan is linked directly to the overarching speech plan of *Waverley*. The title also performs this function: as Scott’s author-historian-narrator explains in the introductory chapter, the choice of “Waverley; or, ’Tis Sixty Years Since” (as opposed to “Waverley, a Tale of Other Days,” “Waverley, a Romance from the German,” “Sentimental Tale,” or “A Tale of the Times”) is meant to signal “neither a romance of chivalry, nor a tale of modern manners,” but, instead, the realist historical novel that *Waverley* turns out to be (Scott 4). Similarly, the epigraph provides important information about the speech plan of the work to which it has been attached. The superficial pertinence of the quotation is clear enough. The subject of *Waverley* being the Jacobite uprising of 1745, the historical moment the fiction presents hinges on the ambiguity of the word “King,” a stable ambiguity that allows the word to name either of two different men, depending on who is listening: “When the dinner was removed, the Baron announced the health of the king, politely leaving to the consciences of his guests to drink to the sovereign *de facto* or *de jure*, as their politics inclined” (48). Because the epigraph consists of a question and an imperative, one is encouraged to imagine a dramatic situation in which someone is forced to declare an allegiance. The question seems to be addressed, specifically, to Edward Waverley, though for him the sovereign ambiguity represents less of a choice and more of a slippage: from the house of his Whig father to the house of his Tory uncle,

from the English army to the Jacobite one, Waverley moves between different cultures and picks up the politics of his companions, as one might pick up the language when travelling in another country. The command “speak or die!” demands a decisive response, an end to the slippage. Even when Waverley impulsively swears fealty to Charles Stuart, however, it is not clear that he has an answer to the sovereignty question, and part of the irony of the threat is that Waverley’s fluid loyalties are eventually absolved of consequences.

Who utters the threat, though? The speaker asks “*which* King,” recognizing two separate kings at once, which the Baron does not quite do when he allows his guests to choose his meaning. Surely the speaker can be neither Hanoverian nor Jacobite, for whom the choice is either between King and Pretender or King and usurper, never between King and King. “Under which King?” can only belong to an outsider. Scott’s historian would have the necessary distance: he attempts to represent the conflict even-handedly, though he is on the right side of history and only uses the word “king” to designate George II elsewhere in the text of *Waverley*. Shakespeare is even further removed from the conflict. But neither of these perspectives would account for the military charge of the epigraph, including the threat of violence and the epithet “Bezonian.” Indeed, “Bezonian” is so Shakespearean a word that it resists the current exercise in reading for superficial pertinence and summons us into the original context, where Shakespeare’s design shapes the meaning of his characters’ utterances.

Here one finds Ancient Pistol, *miles gloriosus*. He arrives to Sir John Falstaff with news of Henry IV’s death, but prolongs the delivery of it. Justice Shallow intervenes, invoking his authority:

SHALLOW. Give me pardon, sir. If, sir, you come with news from the court, I take it there’s but two ways: either to utter them, or conceal them. I am, sir, under

the King in some authority.

PISTOL. Under which king, bezonian? Speak, or die.

SHALLOW. Under King Harry.

PISTOL. Harry the Fourth, or Fifth?

SHALLOW. Harry the Fourth.

PISTOL. A foutre for thine office!

Sir John, thy tender lambkin now is king.

Harry the Fifth's the man. I speak the truth. (Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part*

II 5.3.108-116)

There is some basis in this exchange for the idleness of the threat, at least as it pertains to Edward Waverley's consequences. Its motivation is not military or civil conflict, but Pistol's bravado. The origins of the insult "Bezonian" are military: the term designated a "raw recruit" and, more generally, a "Needy beggar, base fellow, knave, rascal" ("†bezonian, *n.*"). Pistol is issuing his challenge to Justice Shallow incongruously, as if the Justice were a soldier he held in contempt. If Pistol's speech is pertinent to *Waverley* in this respect, there is a more significant impertinence in Scott's quotation of it. The reason Pistol can ask "Under which King, Bezonian?" is that both the men in question are, from his point of view, entitled to be called "King." While the play contains an abortive rebellion against Henry IV, Pistol is not referring to this conflict but to the death of Henry IV and the ascension of his heir, Prince Hal, as Henry V. The ambiguity in the word "King" is altogether of a different sort than it is in *Waverley*. Here we have the formula "The King is dead. Long live the King" played out as a comic pun. Scott fuses the question of the right to sovereignty, raised by Henry IV's usurpation of Richard II, with the superficial pertinence of Pistol's utterance, yielding an epigraph that marshals Shakespeare in service of

Waverley's theme by misrepresenting both texts.

Perhaps due to the wide influence of Scott as much as the wide influence of Shakespeare, Pistol's words continued to wander, appearing with different inflections in unusual places. It is hard to imagine that, without *Waverley*, Lewis Carroll would have quoted Pistol's "well-known words" in his preface to *The Hunting of the Snark* or rendered their context with such wonderful inaccuracy (8). Carroll quotes Pistol to explain the method of his nonsense coinages in "Jabberwocky":

Supposing that, when Pistol uttered the well-known words—

"Under which king, Bezonian? Speak or die!"

Justice Shallow had felt certain that it was either William or Richard, but had not been able to settle which, so that he could not possibly say either name before the other, can it be doubted that, rather than die, he would have gasped out

"Rilchiam!" (8)

Carroll forgets, probably wilfully, that Shallow is not in danger, that neither William nor Richard is on the table, and that the actual options, "Harry" and "Harry," do not make for a very good portmanteau. Carroll carries the impertinence of the quotation to its extreme. There is nothing in Pistol's exchange with Shallow that makes it particularly helpful as an example in this context; instead, the quotation becomes part of the verbal foolery of Carroll's preface, in which he spends more space discussing another poem than that to which the preface is attached and protests ironically that, as his works evidence, he is incapable of writing nonsense.

Seeking Bezonians in "the page infallible of Brewer," one finds further vagaries (Bierce, "Quotation"). In the 1881 edition of the *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* the entry "Bezonian" provides:

A beggar (French, *besoin*; Italian, *bisogno*, want). Sir Walter Scott adopted in his “Waverley” the motto—

Under which king, Bezonian? speak or die.

Shakespeare, “2 Henry IV.,” v.3.

By 1899 Brewer omits the reference to *Waverley*, alters the definition to “A new recruit; applied originally in derision, to young soldiers sent from Spain to Italy, who landed both ill-accounted and in want of everything (Ital. *besogni*, from *bisogno*, need; French *besoin*),” and lists three examples, including Pistol’s speech, another instance from Shakespeare (*Henry VI, Part II*), and one occurrence of the form “besognios” from Scott’s *The Monastery*. The quotation of Pistol is accompanied with a peculiar gloss: “‘Under which king, Bezonian? Speak or die’ (2 *Hen. IV.*, act v. 3). Choose your leader or take the consequences—Caesar or Pompey? ‘Speak or die.’”

Brewer’s allusion to Caesar and Pompey is a better interpretation of Scott’s epigraph than of Pistol’s utterance. Further complicating the matter is the separate entry, “Under which King, Bezonian?” which offers “Which horn of the dilemma is to be taken? (*See BEZONIAN*).” It is undoubtedly this sort of thing that causes Stumpo Gaker’s poor scribbler to “ma[k]e a solemn vow that he would be / Condemned eternally” when he tries to use Brewer to make his quotations truer (Bierce, “Quotation”). Quotations of Pistol’s challenge extend into the 20th century. It has been the title of newspaper articles and essays, notably F. R. Leavis’s article “Under which King, Bezonian?” published in his journal *Scrutiny* in its first year, which attacks Marxism while refusing to align the journal “with a social, economic or political creed or platform” (38). Leavis restores to the quotation a sense of its original context: “The Marxist challenge, then, seems to us as heroic as Ancient Pistol’s and to point to as real alternatives” (45). As of the present writing, one may buy Pistol’s challenge on a T-shirt, coffee mug, or mouse pad

from an online merchant specializing in selling such objects with sundry quotations printed on them.

We have followed Pistol's reverberations some distance away from *Waverley*, but the potential for intertextual drift is part of what is at stake in the impertinence of Scott's epigraph. Its impertinence is ultimately significant because of a larger concern in Scott's novel with the use and abuse of quotation, including his own practice of quoting liberally and taking liberties with quotations. Walter Scott had an extraordinary memory, and it is possible to see his habit of quoting as a mere exercise of it, but the narrator's quotations in *Waverley* mirror the education of Edward Waverley, which is represented as a flawed intertextual process. *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* shares with *Waverley* a preoccupation with pedagogical methodology, the frequent intrusion of snatches of poetry and quotations from literature, and the presence of fool characters with a clear descent from Shakespeare. Adrian Harley and Davie Gellatley encourage us to read quotation as wise folly, simultaneously a mechanism of education and a problem with it.

2. Education

"Life is a tedious process of learning we are Fools," reads "The Pilgrim's Scrip" in 1859, adding, "When we know ourselves Fools, we are already something better" (Meredith, *Feverel* 9). If the fictitious collection of Sir Austin Feverel's aphorisms still reads thus in 1875 or 1896 the reader does not know it, since Meredith removed the quotation when he condensed the opening three chapters of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* into one, toning down the satire of Sir Austin's aphorisms, his female disciples, and his System for educating his son Richard. Meredith's later revisions render the novel's humour less caricatural and the initial exposition

much more direct.² Meredith having, regrettably or not, set the quotation from “The Pilgrim’s Scrip” loose in 1859, I take the liberty of quoting the more intricate opening to his novel. The first edition uncovers slowly the motivation for Austin’s gnomic cynicism, his misogyny, and the convergence of these in the System, presenting first the Aphorist and his aphorisms and then the chapter entitled “A Glimpse Behind the Mask,” while the later editions explain Austin’s motivation baldly at the outset: Sir Austin’s wife left him for his former friend, Denzil Somers, a poet who writes under the alias “Diaper Sandoe.” The narrator suggests that the aphorisms and the System have a common origin in this wound. Sir Austin tends to express his rationale for the System in “his Aphoristic fashion” (16). I will paraphrase: the Fall of Man is recapitulated in the development of every young man. A boy is born free of sin, the “Apple-Disease,” which, as the term suggests, is introduced by woman when the boy’s sexuality awakens. Austin’s System of education aims to fortify Richard for this moment and eventually to marry him off to a carefully vetted young woman who will not corrupt him. The idea is to recreate prelapsarian Adam and mitigate the damage done by Eve.

“The Pilgrim’s Scrip” invokes so frequently Austin’s theory of the corruption of man that Austin’s nephew Adrian Harley calls the “Scrip” the “GREAT SHADDOCK DOGMA,” alluding to a citrus, rather than pomaceous, candidate for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge (11). We have seen in Chapter Two that the aphorism about the tedious process of learning we are fools resembles conventional formulations of the premise of wise folly. (The narrator notes that Austin’s aphorisms are not always original.) Yet Austin’s dogma does not accord well with the wise-foolish attitude he expresses in the “Scrip.” Wise folly, which historically draws from Christian folly, is comfortably postlapsarian. If life really is a tedious process of learning we are fools, and knowing ourselves fools makes us something better, then trying to circumvent this

² See Hergenhan for a discussion of the revisions of *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*.

process of learning, on earth at least, is worse than futile. One is still a fool; one simply doesn't know it. By this logic, Austin denies Richard the knowledge of foolishness that makes wisdom of a kind possible. The logic of Genesis, the mythical basis of the Shaddock Dogma, also implies that Austin is denying Richard such knowledge, though in Genesis this knowledge is assigned a negative value. The apple (or, alternatively, the shaddock) introduces to Adam and Eve both knowledge and sin. The Fall allows Adam and Eve to seek to understand how to be good, but only from a condition of evil, and their salvation ultimately lies outside their own power. Whether one employs the humanistic concept of wise folly or a specifically biblical doctrine of original sin, all humanity finds itself in the same predicament. Richard, however, is to be refused the apple in a world where everyone is supposed to have partaken of it. In other words, Sir Austin's aphorism about learning applies only to those who have not been educated within his System. When we know ourselves Fools we are *already* something better, as if there were the possibility of a further betterment to come, a betterment of one's progeny if not of oneself. Austin has learned his foolishness through the traditional method of becoming a cuckold, and consequently embraces a doctrine of wise folly that he simultaneously attempts to transcend through Richard.

In the System, therefore, the knowledge of folly or sin needs to be denied because, once one knows these things, it is already too late to cure them. For Austin this fatal knowledge is linked to sexual knowledge, which echoes both the association of original sin with concupiscence that has been contentious in Christian theology since Augustine and the ambivalent association of folly with sex in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* (Erasmus 19-20). Sexuality is not the only vehicle of dangerous knowledge in *Feverel*, however. Reading and writing are potentially both signs and sources of corruption. Richard's friend Ripton is caught reading "the

entrancing Adventures of Miss Random, a strange young lady,” and Sir Austin takes this to be a “great triumph to the System” in opposition to the “Wild Oats theory,” to which Ripton’s father subscribes (145). Richard, on the other hand, goes through a bookish phase that does not in itself trouble Austin much. Richard “was growing to be lord of kingdoms: where Beauty was his Handmaid, and History his Minister, and Time his ancient Harper, and sweet Romance his Bride: where he walked in a realm vaster and more gorgeous than the great Orient, peopled with the heroes that have been” (111). The narrator describes Richard’s condition in language that could belong to Austin in a sentimental phase, recognizing the awakening of adolescent desire but believing it to be still uncorrupt:

For there is no princely wealth, and no loftiest heritage to equal this early one that is made bountifully common to so many, when the ripening blood has put a spark to the imagination, and the earth is seen through rosy mists of a thousand fresh-awakened nameless and aimless desires, panting for bliss, and taking it as it comes; making of any sight or sound, perforce of the enchantment they carry with them, a key to infinite, because innocent, pleasure. The passions then are gambolling cubs; not the ravaging gluttons they grow to. They have their teeth and their talons, but they neither tear nor bite. They are in counsel and fellowship with the quickened heart and brain. The whole sweet system moves to music.

(111)

The description here is laden with partially disavowed eroticism, which accumulates in such phrases as “panting for bliss, and taking it as it comes” despite the disclaimers of “nameless and aimless desires” and “infinite, because innocent, pleasure.” The reference to Richard’s “sweet system” echoes the System through which Sir Austin interprets Richard’s development. It

becomes clear that the narrator is performing Austin's logic, under which it is possible to quarantine the healthy blossoms of this stage in Richard's development, the "Blossoming Season," from the immanent threat of the Apple-Disease. Austin says, "The blood is healthy, the mind virtuous: neither instigates the other to evil, and both are perfecting toward the flower of manhood. If he reach that pure—in the untainted fulness and perfection of his natural powers, I am indeed a happy father!" (111). Austin's "If" suggests the possibility that something might divert this process of perfection. Richard's aimless desire may take aim, concretely, at a woman.

There is evidence that Richard's passionate reading is actually related to his desire for women: Richard retreats to his books after he loses a swimming race, and we are told he loses the race because he catches sight of Lady Blandish's bonnet appearing over Sir Austin Feverel's shoulder. Meredith narrates the scene with the abstraction that he sometimes uses as a sly form of delicacy, but it is evident that Sir Austin has invited Lady Blandish, without Richard's knowledge, to observe him, and that Richard is in the nude. We are told, "It was the Bonnet had beaten him, not Ralph. The Bonnet, typical of the Mystery that caused his heart those violent palpitations, the Bonnet was his dear, detestable enemy" (110-11). This race is an event in Richard's sexual development, and it is significant we are next given the erotically charged description of his reading, which represents, *pace* Sir Austin, a resting place for desire already awakened by a woman. Soon Austin comes to question his previous interpretation of Richard's literary phase, provoked by a kind of literary activity that, unlike reading, Austin cannot consider to be an innocent sign of the Blossoming Season: writing poetry. Austin does not articulate his objection apart from saying "No Feverel has ever written Poetry," but this is clearly not the problem (113). Austin commands Richard to burn his manuscript:

A strange man had been introduced to him [Richard], who traversed and bisected

his skull with sagacious stiff fingers, and crushed his soul while, in an infallible voice, declaring him the animal he was: making him feel such an animal! Not only his blossoms withered, his being seemed to draw in its shoots and twigs. And when, coupled thereunto (the strange man having departed, his work done), his father, in his tenderest manner, stated that it would give him great pleasure to see those same precocious, utterly valueless, scribblings among the cinders, the last remaining mental blossoms spontaneously fell away. (113)

Here the narrator appropriates the terminology of the System, turning it to Richard's defense: Richard's poetry, part of his blossoming, is destroyed through this violent transformation of his father, who perhaps sees poetry not as part of the Blossoming Season but as a prelude to the dangers of the impending "Magnetic Age." It is not clear if this is precisely how Austin sees poetry because the Hyde-like "strange man" declaring to Richard that he is an animal is not the articulate Aphorist who has sublimated his pain into a System. Poetry evidently touches the original wound that underlies Austin's thought: we are reminded, "his wounded heart had its reasons for being much disturbed" (113). Diaper Sandoe is a poet.

Sir Austin may be motivated by personal prejudice when he condemns Richard's scribbling, but Richard's poetic tendencies do partially bear Sir Austin out in that they issue in romance and romantic misadventure. Richard falls in love with Lucy in a scene in which the narrator refers to the couple as Ferdinand and Miranda. Richard attempts to rescue Lucy's lost book from a stream, but is only able to recover some paper, which turns out to be a "remnant of his burnt Offering! a page of the sacrificed Poems! one Blossom preserved from the deadly universal blight" (131). Richard quotes to himself a couplet from the solitary sonnet Lucy has recovered, in which he imagines asking the stars to tell him of his future love. Hesper replies:

“Through sunset’s amber see me shining fair, / As her blue eyes shine through her golden hair” (132). I have discussed the othering effect of explicit quotation in novelistic discourse. In this case, interpreting a quotation of one’s own words becomes a way of consolidating the self and its desires over time. Richard’s slightly younger self did not intend the couplet to be about Lucy, and his choice of “blue eyes” and “golden hair” is not surprising; it imitates an ideal of the fair woman he is likely to have encountered reading love sonnets. (Richard has seen Lucy before, as a girl of thirteen, but he does not recognize her.) The occurrence of these features in Lucy strikes him as significant, and he reads her back into the poem: “Here were two blue eyes, and golden hair; and by some strange chance, that appeared like the working of a divine finger, she had become the possessor of the prophecy, she that was to fulfil it!” (132). While formally delineating the difference between Richard’s past and present discourses, the quotation shows Richard in the process of merging them, casting Lucy into the role of his beloved, a role he had already prepared for her in the writing of his verse, while summoning into the present the emotion that previously moved his pen: “Richard strove to remember the hour, and the mood of mind, in which he had composed the notable production” (132).

Poetry continues to shape and express Richard’s courtship of Lucy. As Neil Roberts observes, during the climax of the pastoral scene in the chapter “A Diversion on a Penny-Whistle,” Richard and Lucy even begin to speak blank verse:

“Lucy, did you never dream of meeting me?”

“O Richard! yes; for I remembered you.”

“Lucy! and did you pray that we might meet?” (169; Roberts 28)

Therefore, when Richard flouts Sir Austin’s System by pursuing Lucy, his actions mirror the original wounding of Austin that gave rise to the System. The implication appears to be that Sir

Austin is right about poetry: it is a sign of corruption, of the “Apple-Disease” that is responsible for postlapsarian man. Richard marries Lucy against his father’s will, and continues his romantic career under the delusion that it is his vocation to rescue fallen women from further sin, fancying himself both a knight and a Titan (383). One of these women, Bella Mount, seduces Richard in a scene that culminates in her performance of several fragments of songs, original to Meredith. Stanzas of these are reproduced in the novel. They shade from elegiac to salacious, from

Once the sweet Romance of story

Clad thy moving form with grace:

Once the world and all its glory

Was but framework to thy face. (414)

to

If I had a husband, what think you I’d do?

I’d make it my business to keep him a lover:

For when a young gentleman ceases to woo,

Some other amusement he’ll quickly discover. (414)

Bella continues to sing a Spanish ballad, which Richard enters into imaginatively, projecting the ballad onto Bella much as he projected his own love poetry onto Lucy: “The lady in the ballad had been wronged. Lo! it was the lady before him; and soft horns blew; he smelt the languid night-flowers; he saw the stars crowd large and close above the arid plain; this lady leaning at her window desolate, pouring out her abandoned heart” (414-15). The narrator asks what affects Richard so strongly, “Was it the Champagne? the music? the poetry? Something of the two former, perhaps: but most the Enchantress playing upon him” (415). The parallel structure says implicitly that the Enchantress played upon him through the poetry. The chapter ends in a

passionate kiss and the narrator's corruption of a quotation from *Richard III*, which he does not mark with quotation marks, perhaps because he wishes to take credit for the emendation of "woman" to "Hero," a crossing of gender that reflects Bella's cross-dressing in this scene: "Was ever Hero in this fashion won?" (416).

It is clear that Richard's romanticism is partly his downfall, here and later, when he insists on duelling Lord Mountfalcon to protect Lucy's honour; that this romanticism is related to his reading; and that *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* therefore takes on a version of the Quixotic subject. In this the novel echoes its precursor, *Waverley*, which presents its hero in a similar situation to Richard, with an absent mother and male guardians who are responsible for his education, but who fail to prevent it from going awry. Edward spends his youth shuttling between his Whig father and his Tory uncle, neither of whom altogether takes responsibility for his education. Under the care of a tutor who does not monitor him, Edward independently pursues an extensive but "desultory course of reading" and develops a romantic turn of mind that results in misadventure (15). The apparent conflict between realism and romance that is dramatized in *Waverley*, and that also appears in *Feverel*, has been sufficiently discussed elsewhere, especially in the case of Scott.³ Ian Duncan's reading of romance and realism in the novel avoids drawing the line between them sharply. Duncan argues that the nineteenth-century British novel negotiates romance and anti-romance dialectically: "The old commonplace of an antithetical relation between romance and reality, invoked by the novel in its own apologies of origin, produces a new, dialectical figure of romance as the fulcrum against which—positioned on its edge, between inside and out—reality can be turned around (2). This view prevents the kind of difficulty that can emerge from seeing realism primarily in opposition to the conventions

³ In the case of Meredith, see Gillian Beer for a discussion of education, reality, and romance in *The Adventures of Harry Esmond*.

of romance, as George Levine does in *The Realistic Imagination*, which puts realism in the awkward position of permanently taking the side of disillusionment and resistance to convention, despite its own illusions and conventions, and consequently struggling perpetually with the contradictions of its own form. It is clear enough, however, that romanticism has historically been considered part of the danger of reading, and that it is a danger with which the realist novel often concerns itself. As Duncan writes, “When, at a crucial stage in his adventures, we are told that Waverley ‘gave himself up to the romance of his situation,’ the term means something like ‘psychological effect derived from imaginative literature.’ Scott thus helped establish romance in its two dominant modern senses, objective and subjective: as a traditional literary form, and as a state of the imagination” (56-57). This problem of quixotic romanticism is related to the problem of quotation that motivates the current discussion of reading and education in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* and *Waverley*, because both are problems of what readers do with the units of their reading.

The narrator diagnoses Waverley’s education as “somewhat desultory,” applying this adjective to his studies five times in the novel (12).⁴ Not only is Waverley’s education “regulated alternately by the taste and opinions of his uncle and of his father,” Waverley’s reading practices, which revolve around his own pleasure, are evidently also to blame. Duncan focuses primarily on Waverley’s taste for romance, broadly construed, seeing Waverley as a female quixote, after the eighteenth-century conception of the passive feminine reader: “Edward Waverley is less like Don Quixote, who rides out to force his visions on the world, than the generic type of eighteenth-century romance reader, the *female* quixote, whose imagination suspends her from intercourse with society” (63). Although Edward’s romantic temperament does lead him to act in certain

⁴ In the 1829 General Preface to the Magnum edition of the Waverley Novels, Scott uses the word once more to reveal that Waverley’s reading was based on his own. See the 1972 Penguin edition, p.521.

ways, such as joining the Jacobite cause, he remains at a remove from real historical conflict: “Heroic death for others, sedentary life for a subject who looks on: we read the elegiac structure of sentimental romance. For Waverley’s absence, the ethos of romance, is just what saves him from the death sentence of historical engagement. The hero’s passivity entails not a failure of action so much as one of purposeful commitment” (84). Ina Ferris, similarly, sees Edward as a “type of female reader,” though she places more emphasis on the “significant social effects” of female reading performed by males, arguing that the “Waverley Novels opened up the novel to the male gender as both writing and reading, establishing novel writing as a literary activity and legitimating novel reading as a manly practice” (99, 101, 80).

With the model of Edward as female quixote in mind, I would like to examine more of the narrator’s remarks about Edward’s reading. “His powers of apprehension were so uncommonly quick” that his Oxonian tutor is hard pressed to “prevent him . . . from acquiring his knowledge in a slight, flimsy, and inadequate manner” (Scott 13). Edward only reads what he enjoys, and will not “fi[x] his attention on critical distinctions of philology, upon the difference of idiom, the beauty of felicitous expression, or the artificial combinations of syntax” (13). He does not develop “habits of firm and incumbent application” or “the art of controuling, directing, and concentrating the powers of his own mind for earnest investigation—an art far more essential than even that learning which is the primary object of study” (13). Edward’s uncle does not hinder him, thinking “the mere tracing of the alphabetical characters with the eye . . . in itself a useful and meritorious task,” and not caring “what ideas or doctrines they may happen to convey” (14). Edward “dr[ives] through the sea of books, like a vessel without a pilot or a rudder” until he is satisfied (14). As a result, he “store[s] in a memory of uncommon tenacity, much curious, though ill-arranged and miscellaneous information,” but “kn[ows] little of what adds dignity to

man, and qualifies him to support and adorn an elevated situation in society” (15). His “surfeit of idle reading” results in a “dainty, squeamish, and fastidious taste,” “unfit[ness] for serious and sober study,” and “habits of abstraction and love of solitude” (16).

In presenting the case study thus, as fully as I dare without reproducing pages of *Waverley* wholesale, I quote inordinately, but this inordinate quotation is part of the point. I attempt to convey my understanding of *Waverley*’s design, of its speech plan as a long and complex utterance. But this understanding, insofar as it is articulable, consists of fragments of Scott’s discourse suspended in a medium of summary, paraphrase, and my own thoughts, an incomplete merging of his discourse and mine. The reader, especially the student or scholar, is reduced to jumping between pieces of utterances, which is why I believe new critical readings of old texts remain valuable—they are a way of pooling, negotiating, and continually renovating our active responsive understandings of long and complex utterances. I take this metaphor of jumping from the etymology of “desultory,” which it shares with the noun “desultor,” or “circus horse-leaper” (“desultor, *n.*”). It is difficult not to read desultorily. My series of quotations, or horses, reveals a constellation of concerns underlying the narrator’s judgment of what *Waverley* reads, how he reads it, and how this reading affects him. There are suggestions that *Waverley* reads books that convey dangerous ideas or doctrines, and that *Waverley* does not develop an intellectual discipline rooted in values of masculinity and good public citizenship. There is also a suggestion, perhaps more pertinent today because its values are entrenched in university education, that *Waverley* is not a *critical* reader—that, were he to “fi[x] his attention upon critical distinctions of philology, upon the difference of idiom, the beauty of felicitous expression, or the artificial combinations of syntax,” and to take care to select and frame what he reads in a less “ill-arranged and miscellaneous” manner, he would be better able to make use of what he

reads.⁵ He would, perhaps, still be a horse jumper, but he would be a better one. Instead, Edward has a simplistic notion of literacy as the mere ability to get to the end of a book knowing what the words mean: “‘I can read and understand a Latin author,’ said young Edward, with the self-confidence and rash reasoning of fifteen, ‘and Scaliger or Bentley could not do much more’” (13).

In literary criticism, reading, and education, direct quotation of texts creates thresholds between discourses, where critics, readers, students—these categories intersect—stake their claims to understand the relationship between the speech plan of a work and that of the fragment. Yet it is not Edward’s quotations I will principally be concerned with in the following section. Certainly, Edward has moments of wayward intertextuality: he casts his first love interest, Flora MacIvor, as Romeo’s first love Rosaline, announces to himself “I will love my Rosaline no more,” and begins to think of Rose as his Juliet, oblivious to the foolishness of pursuing an identification with Romeo that far (273). The narrator is the one with a penchant for direct quotation, however. At one point the narrator seems to use quotation to represent Edward’s habits of mind. The narrator says, “Edward loved to ‘chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancy,’ and, like a child amongst his toys, culled and arranged, from the splendid yet useless imagery and emblems with which his imagination was stored, visions as brilliant and as fading as those of an evening sky” (19). It appears that the narrator has chosen to quote *As You Like It* because it is what Edward would do, but the narrator has his own store of imagery and emblems. At one point he quotes Anna Seward—“O nymph, unrelenting and cold as thou art, / My bosom is proud as thine own”—and then tells us, “With the feeling expressed in these beautiful lines (which however were not then written,) Waverley determined upon convincing Flora that he was not to

⁵ For another interpretation of the problem of Edward’s education, see Kenneth Sroka. Sroka suggests a distinction between useless knowledge and a useful knowledge that is more likely to be acquired by experience, but argues that there is an “interpenetration of ‘useful’ and ‘useless’ knowledge” in *Waverley* (146).

be depressed by a rejection” (222). The anachronistic quotation forcibly separates the narrator’s intertextual frame of reference from *Waverley*’s, importing feeling from a work Edward cannot have read and attributing it to him. The activity of culling and arranging literary fragments being under scrutiny in *Waverley*, the narrator’s indulgence of this activity is relevant to his assessment of Edward’s education. In both *Waverley* and *Feverel*, the problem of quotation is a general one, with particular application both to the intertextual formation of the hero’s own discourse and to the reader’s encounter with quotations inserted into the narrative discourse. Hero and reader are parallel, engaged in the process of forging a coherent understanding from incongruous fragments. In both texts, there is a character who acts as a mediator in this process, and that character is a Fool.

3. Adrian and Davie

In the aphorism “Life is a tedious process of learning we are Fools,” the upper-case F is Austin’s (Meredith, *Feverel* 9). Liberal capitalization, however, is a general idiosyncrasy in the narrator’s rendering of Austin’s discourse, Adrian Harley’s, and his own. It is a device of George Meredith’s pronounced style. Not merely a throwback to the eighteenth-century, Meredith’s liberal majuscules are a mark of the “abstract portraiture” to which Meredith tends, and in which Austin and Adrian also indulge (343). Meredith does not usually capitalize the word “fool,” but does so again when referring to one of Bella Mount’s entourage at a dinner party in Richmond: “Mrs. Mount was flashing her teeth and eyes with laughter at one of her Court, who appeared to be Fool” (374). The initial capital and the odd omission of the article, preserved in the later editions, indicate that “Fool” is being used as a name, as in *King Lear*, where the Fool is never given his own name. “Fool” designates a conventional dramatic category: in the metaphor of

Bella's Fool at Court and in Austin's aphorism, "Fool" does not merely signify a foolish person, but also suggests character type, especially the type of the wise fool.

I have largely avoided typology in this study. The categories of *pharmakeus* or *pharmakos* refer to the function of a narrator or character within the narrative rhetoric of a given novel rather than to a type with consistent conventional content. The fool as he appears in Shakespeare has been a means of identifying and explaining the techniques of wise folly, and if I have sometimes suggested that narrators or characters play the wise fool, I have resisted identifying them with the role they play. In the realist novel, one does not encounter typical fools so much as characters wearing the mask of wise folly. It is rare to find a simple deployment of the type because realist characters tend not to be typical in the same way as characters in drama. Rameau underscores this distinction in Diderot's *Le neveu de Rameau* with a novelistic reading of Molière: "quand je lis *L'Avare*, je me dis: sois avare, si tu veux; mais garde-toi de parler comme l'avare. Quand je lis le *Tartuffe*, je me dis: sois hypocrite, si tu veux; mais ne parle pas comme l'hypocrite. . . . Je suis moi et je reste ce que je suis; mais j'agis et je parle comme il convient" (111).⁶ Rameau distinguishes carefully between the type and the person who is performing it, even where the usual reading assumes no difference, and he is himself an example of the wise fool becoming a rounded, novelistic character who performs a flat role. As Michael André Bernstein argues, there is more to Rameau than his role, which he is aware of, but can't seem to escape. Characters in novels who perform wise folly tend to be more like Rameau than like Lear's Fool, though it is possible to see how Rameau emerges from Lear's Fool. Yet there are ways of attaching the mask more securely to a character's face, of putting the character in the characterological equivalent of quotation marks. Eliot does this with Hans to a degree by

⁶ When I read *L'Avare* I tell myself: be miserly if you like, but take care not to talk like the miser. When I read *Tartuffe*, I tell myself: be hypocritical if you like, but don't talk like the hypocrite. . . . I am me and I remain what I am; but I act and speak appropriately.

designating him eccentric, a creature “made for mishaps,” but these characterological quotation marks have merely an othering function, not also an attributing one; they are an analogue of “scare quotes,” which insist (as I have just done) not that the enclosed words belong to anyone in particular but that the speaker does not take responsibility for them (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 378). Meredith and Scott’s quoted characters have more distinct origins.

The Fool in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* is Adrian Harley, the “Wise Youth.” Adrian’s most obvious prototype is Falstaff, though Adrian is more urbane and polished, with a crafted cynicism that seems related to his perpetual reading of his sole “intimates,” Gibbon and Horace: “the society of these fine aristocrats of literature helped him to accept humanity as it had been, and was; a Supreme Ironic Procession, with Laughter of Gods in the background. Why not Laughter of Mortals also? Adrian had his laugh in his comfortable corner. He possessed peculiar attributes of a Heathen God. He was a disposer of men: he was polished, luxurious, and happy—at their cost” (34). Falstaff himself is not simply a fool character but a compound of several other types. Northrop Frye writes: “In Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch we can see the affinities of the buffoon or entertainer type both with the parasite and with the master of revels” (175). The parasite “does nothing but entertain the audience by talking about his appetite”; the master of revels or cook provides “a center for the comic mood,” and descends from the cook of Greek Middle Comedy, “who breaks into comedies to bustle and order about and make long speeches about the mysteries of cooking” (175). Falstaff is the adherent to and proponent of a festive philosophy of food, and especially of drink: “If I had a thousand sons, the first human principle I would teach them should be to forswear thin potations, and to addict themselves to sack” (Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part II* 4.2.117-20). Adrian, too, is master of revels. When Sir Austin forbids drink at Richard’s birthday, “to the delight of all present, Adrian, ever provident, puts his

hand behind him and leads forth a flask, saying that he had anticipated this possibility” (Meredith, *Feverel* 59). Adrian is also a parasite, who “had been destined for the Church,” but has become merely “a fixture in the Abbey” at Raynham (35). Meredith has made Adrian even closer to his typical sources than Falstaff is, since Meredith displaces Falstaff’s poor digestion onto the dry-as-dust scholar Hippas Feverel, leaving Adrian free to enjoy his appetite. As Richard says: “He’s very fond of eating; that’s all I know of Adrian” (184). As a cook figure Adrian delights in announcing Richard’s unauthorized wedding by delivering wedding cake around London, is extremely particular about soft-boiled eggs, and has a dalliance with Richard’s wife Lucy that revolves chiefly around cookery. Furthermore, the implication that there is wisdom in the antics of the Wise Youth, who sleeps “knowing himself wise in a mad world,” and who “has attained that felicitous point of wisdom from which one sees all mankind to be fools,” links his role to that of the wise fool—with the crucial difference that he is insufficiently self-critical, and therefore not successful (60, 311).⁷

Lady Blandish responds to Sir Austin’s charge that “Falstaff is only to us [women] an incorrigible fat man” by desiring “to know what he *illustrates*” (203). Adrian, in turn, is more than an incorrigible fat youth. Like Hans’s fragility, the characteristics that Falstaff and Adrian share are peculiarly innate, which underscores their symbolic function. Falstaff claims: “My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon with a white head, and something a round belly” (Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part II* 1.2.181-83). Meredith’s narrator tells us of Adrian, “Some people are born green: others yellow. Adrian was born yellow. He was always on the ripe sensible side of a question”; and:

A singular mishap (at his birth, possibly, or before it) had unseated that organ [his heart], and shaken it down to his stomach, where it was a much lighter, nay, an

⁷ See Frank Curtin, who reads Adrian as a figure of the limits of comedy.

inspiring, weight, and encouraged him merrily onward. Throned in that region, it looked on little that did not arrive to gratify it. Already that region was a trifle prominent in the person of the Wise Youth, and carried, as it were, the flag of his philosophical tenets in front of him. (33, 34)

That Falstaff and Adrian have always had their appetites and their worldliness helps to bestow on them a literary function and a clear descent from type. Meredith marks Adrian from birth, “or before it”—a phrase that refers ambiguously to his two conceptions: one of which occurs in his fictitious mother’s womb, the other in his author’s head. Fools are metafictional. As Molly tells Adrian, “You’re al’ays as good as a play” (173).

Waverley’s Fool is Davie Gellatley, the Baron Bradwardine’s kept fool, who reminds Edward of “one of Shakspeare’s roynish clowns” (Scott 41). In the Magnum edition Scott provides a footnote to explain what he knows about “the ancient and established custom of keeping fools” (85n.). Between the reference to Shakespeare and the note, Scott implies two slightly discordant origins for the character: one literary, the other historical. Wilmon Brewer, tracking Shakespeare’s influence on Scott, resolves this discord in favour of the literary, since “Gellatley resembles not only Shakespearean clowns in general but the Fool of King Lear in particular—a character whom at about the same time Scott had praised highly in his criticism” (246). Similarly, John Mayer draws a distinction between the historical specificity of Davie, which Scott emphasizes in the note, and the character himself, whom “the reader might regard as more akin to a Shakespearean fool than rooted in historical reality” (921). Davie’s roots affect how one reads him: as a type character whose meaning is metaphorical, or a historical character who belongs to the network of metonymic connections through which, as Harry Shaw argues, historical realism creates a sense of being embedded in history. Shaw suggests that metonymic

and metaphorical meanings are not mutually exclusive, but that “a fictional passage highlights and invites us to pursue” them in varying combinations (*Narrating Reality* 233). Like the epigraph from *Henry IV, Part II*, Davie is poised between two designs in which he has two different meanings, and Scott incorporates this doubleness into his own design. Davie is not merely a historical artifact, but also performs the role of the wise fool, commenting indirectly on the discourses of the fiction in which he finds himself, including the network of intertextual connections to which he belongs.

The story of Davie’s birth, like the reference to Adrian’s, makes his typical role into a birthright. Rose tells Waverley: “This poor creature had a brother, and Heaven, as if to compensate to the family Davie’s deficiencies, had given him what the hamlet thought uncommon talents” (59). Later, she recounts a more thorough version of the story, which begins, “Once upon a time there lived an old woman, called Janet Gellatley, who was suspected to be a witch, on the infallible grounds that she was very old, very ugly, very poor, and had two sons, one of whom was a poet, and the other a fool, which visitation, all the neighbourhood agreed, had come upon her for the sin of witchcraft” (65). Davie’s “deficiencies” come with gifts that help him to fulfill his role, including “a prodigious memory, stored with miscellaneous snatches and fragments of all tunes and songs, which he sometimes applied, with considerable address, as the vehicles of remonstrance, explanation, or satire” (58). The reference to Davie’s memory recalls Edward’s “memory of uncommon tenacity,” storing “much curious, though ill-arranged and miscellaneous information,” which Edward applies to understand the world around him (15). Davie’s primary means of communicating is quotation. He comments on the Baron Bradwardine’s deflection of a duel with the Laird of Balmawhapple by singing “an old ballad” comparing the love, wrath, and fighting habits of young and old men, with a nonsense refrain

about birds and “something like a satirical emphasis” (66-67). The ballad communicates something, probably simply that the old Baron has subdued the young Laird, but Edward cannot decipher it. What Davie does to Edward here is a parodically exaggerated version of what the narrator does to the reader repeatedly, habitually referring us to quotations of literature and folk song in order to enrich his narration. When the narrator cryptically conveys Cecilia Stubb’s affection for Jonas Culbertfield by mutilating a quotation from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, he is being no less playful, and scarcely more direct, than Davie (25).

Davie’s “old ballad,” incidentally, is probably original to Scott (66n.28). The importance of Davie’s quotation is primarily that it has the form of quotation. Davie is a conduit of words designated other. Some of those words are attributed to Davie’s dead brother, the genius poet, who is a figure for the source as cipher: “He [Davie’s brother] was affectionate and compassionate to his brother, who followed him like his shadow, and we think that from him Davie gathered many fragments of songs and music unlike those of this country” (59). The brother is irrecoverable, untraceable: Davie never mentions his name, and if asked about his sources “either answers with wild and long fits of laughter, or else breaks into tears of lamentation” (59). Davie’s story is presented at the centre of a web of quotations and other forms of intertextuality, which helps to establish him as a figure for intertextual processes. Rose Bradwardine tells the story of Janet as a sequel to a song she sings about the peak St. Swithin’s Chair, which is also the occasion for Edward to remember a “rhyme quoted by Edgar in King Lear,” and for the narrator to misquote slightly a couplet about anonymity, which he leaves anonymous, but which is in fact from John Leyden’s *Scenes of Infancy* (64 and n.11-12). The ballad itself, or the fragment that Rose remembers, which is provided in full and is original to Scott, tells a Gothic story of the “Night-Hag,” and provokes the story of Janet (64n.19). Rose

tells this story as if she were repeating a traditional tale, beginning with the fairy-story formula of “Once upon a time” and employing a simple repetitive style: “very old, very ugly, very poor.” Although in the end the clergymen who try Janet for witchcraft look credulous and ridiculous, and in the Magnum edition a footnote traces the historical inspiration for the incident, Rose’s anecdote nevertheless asserts a romantic mood that produces “romantic legends” and a discussion of

All those idle thoughts and fantasies,
Devices, dreams, opinions unsound,
Shows, visions, soothsayers, and prophecies,
And all that feigned is, as leasings, tales, and lies. (66)

The function of the narrator’s quotation from the *Faerie Queen* is ambiguous: although in this context it ostensibly deprecates the fancies it catalogues, the intrusion of Spenser’s words into Scott’s is an instance of the wise folly of quotation, Scott’s use of the very practices his novel questions through Davie and through Edward’s education. Davie’s story sits at the centre of this portion of the chapter, flanked on the one side by *King Lear*, John Leyden, and a Gothic ballad; on the other, by *The Faerie Queen*. As they flirt with the folly of “all that feigned is, as leasings, tales, and lies,” Waverley, Rose, and the narrator himself resemble Davie. Haunting each of the numerous instances of literary quotation in *Waverley* is the image of Davie, like a “shadow,” channelling the alien genius of his dead brother’s poetry.

Davie’s quotations create the incongruity to which quotation is subject. The greatest incongruity occurs when Edward finds Davie in the ruins of Tully-Veolan. Davie is singing an “old Scottish song” that is really a pastiche of old ballads, including the “Lament of the Border Widow” and the “Lady Turned Serving-Man,” which evokes the attack on Tully-Veolan: “They

came upon us in the night, / And brake my bower and slew my knight” (317 and n.11-18).

Beginning another song, Davie pretends that the inhabitants of the manor, including the Baron and Rose, are dead:

But follow, follow me—

While glow-worms light the lea,

I'll shew ye where the dead should be— (318)

It is a story that suits its stage, appropriate to the ravaged estate, though completely false. The phrase “should be” is suggestive beyond the immediate context, pointing to the ongoing negotiation between kinds of narrative frameworks through both Edward’s behaviour and Scott’s writing. Edward is always to be found working to create heroic narratives. He joins with Prince Charles to help enact the narrative of the restored and rightful king, but he falters when he realizes that this also entails enacting the fall of those who are equally heroic, such as Colonel Gardiner. *Waverley* itself in the end is partially sympathetic to such values. Scott partakes of them in contriving an ending with so few losses. Not only does Waverley survive his ordeal, the Baron Bradwardine is exonerated for his second act of treason and is by the efforts of his friends restored to his estate. We have seen Ian Duncan explain the difference between the sphere of historical action, in which Fergus MacIvor dies for his cause, and the sphere of feminine romance reading, in which the stakes are never so high. Davie’s poem suggests what might have happened in *Waverley*—indeed, what “*should*” have happened had Scott been interested only in representing events that might plausibly have happened in history rather than the experience of historicity.⁸ The absence of the past source (Davie’s brother) and the presence and imperfection of the quoting instance (Davie) inform Scott’s history, including his use of folk sources. The

⁸ See Shaw, *Narrating Reality*: “At its most ambitious, realist fiction offers us the possibility of participating in the workings of a mind capable of following the unfolding of that most real of modern phenomena, the workings of history itself” (107).

differences in context made visible by impertinent quotation function like the narrator's remarks about precarious rafts at a Highland burial in *The Fair Maid of Perth*, which, as Shaw argues, do more than ridicule "primitive societies and their absurdities" (*The Forms of Historical Fiction* 147). By breaking away from the seriousness of the scene, the narrator emphasizes his distance from it: "The joke is really on us as readers and on Scott himself. He cannot and does not want to offer us a facile merging with the past. His fiction does not provide the chance to live in the days of yesteryear. We can only visit the past, catch glimpses of it, wonder about what it meant to its regular inhabitants. We are different from the Highlanders" (*The Forms of Historical Fiction* 147-48). Through his historical fiction and *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, in which he collects and reproduces folk ballads, mediated by his fallible but "prodigious" memory of "uncommon tenacity," Scott attempts to preserve and understand the past, but exhibits his awareness of historical and cultural remove and of the vagaries—the desultoriness—of the processes that make present the past, including its words, discourses, and patterns of thought.

Edward's education connects the formation of a historical understanding of the past to the formation of an adult understanding of the world. Davie is, thus, a pedagogical figure. Adrian Harley is more explicitly so, because he is the tutor Sir Austin chooses for Richard. As my earlier comparison of Adrian to Falstaff suggests, Adrian is not the best choice for the success of the System, but Adrian can quote the "Scrip" like the Devil quotes scripture, and often engages Sir Austin in debates about his own aphorisms. Like Rameau's nephew, *il parle comme il convient*, and few see through his aura of virtue to the roles of parasite, master of revels, and fool that he consistently plays. Adrian's other favourite source for quotations is Diaper Sandoe, Austin's nemesis and what Gillian Beer calls "[p]oetry's representative in the book" (21). Sir Austin once recognized Diaper as a poet of "Genius" (Meredith, *Feverel* 21). Diaper has

declined, however, and appears rarely in the novel, always with a high degree of abstraction. He has no dialogue, but we are told he speaks in blank verse, “for seldom writing metrically now, he took to talking it” (Meredith, *Feverel* 105). Diaper functions much like Davie’s brother. As a character he is more symbol than substance, and he is present primarily through the numerous quotations of him. Richard, who is initially ignorant of his mother’s infidelity, does not understand his father’s quarrel with Diaper, and is fond of Diaper’s poetry, a perverse fondness encouraged by Adrian.

Adrian represents an alternative view of poetry to Sir Austin’s, one that takes pleasure in its indeterminate value. Like Davie he is the active and citational half of the symbolic poetic brotherhood. He is a vocal proponent of Diaper’s poetry, probably not for its own sake but as a tool for provoking others. In an argument with his cousin Austin Wentworth, another of Sir Austin’s nephews, he defends Diaper’s pessimistic portrait of the “Age of Work,” which dismally represents the industrial age and which prophecies:

From this unrest, lo, early wreck’d,
A Future staggers crazy,
Ophelia of the Ages, deck’d
With woful weed and daisy! (73)

Adrian clearly delights in the poem as a defense of license, and he cites it to support what amounts to his manifesto of wise folly: “Well! all Wisdom is mournful. ’Tis therefore, coz, that the Wise do love the Comic Muse. Their own high food would kill them. You shall find great poets, rare philosophers, night after night on the broad grin before a row of yellow lights and mouthing masks. Why? because all’s dark at home. The Stage is the pastime of great minds” (72). With a “’Tis” and a Shakespearean “coz,” Adrian gives his version of Touchstone’s old “saying,”

and explains the wisdom of folly.

In the chapter “The Hero Takes a Step,” Richard’s crucial decision to elope with Lucy is immediately preceded by two scenes of frequent quotation. In the first, Adrian “is trying zealously to torment a laugh, or a confession of irritation, out of his hearers,” and displays his “peculiarities of the professional joker” (234). He quotes poetry repeatedly: first a Middle English poem, which he alters to feature Hippias passing wind; then fragments of Richard’s poetry, which he criticizes; and, finally, a fragment of song from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which he adapts to suit his moral “all’s game to the poet!” (236 and n.11). Though Adrian has no immediate effect on Richard, and thinks Richard has “quite beat him,” later Hippias does pass wind, and this inadvertent quotation of Adrian plunges Richard into a laughter that is “like madness come upon him” (237, 239). Richard then begins playing the fool himself, translating an allegory of Sir Austin’s about the pursuit of the “Golden Bride” into extemporaneous verse, which, given Austin’s opinion of poetry, is a deliberate indignity to Austin’s words. The Golden Bride evidently signifies not a woman but a state of masculine energy. Observing Richard’s excitement, Hippias suggests that Richard has found the Golden Bride, unaware that Richard is contemplating securing himself a golden-haired bride presently. The irony intensifies as Richard transitions into a recital of Diaper’s love poetry, including the lines “But Beauty’s for the largest heart, / And all abysses Love can bridge!” which leaves Hippias, who knows Diaper’s love was Austin’s loss, “laugh[ing]; grimly, as men laugh at the emptiness of words” (242). Shortly after, Richard learns that his rival Tom Blaize is on his way to marry Lucy, and decides to defy the System and marry her himself. Adrian’s foolery, therefore, which exploits the ambivalent status of poetry in the text, marks the character of the entire event, including the folly of Richard’s impetuous defiance of his father, which is simultaneously wisdom in that it rejects the folly of

Sir Austin's System.

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel does not affirm Adrian's values. Curtin sees the end of the novel as a denial of the adequacy of comedy, and of Adrian as its representative. He cites Adrian's absence from Lady Blandish's letter to Austin Wentworth, which constitutes the novel's final chapter (278). This absence is especially significant given Adrian's final appearance. Adrian delivers a cryptic parting prophecy to Richard, who is preparing for his duel with Mountfalcon, which he will survive but Lucy will not: "I can no longer witness this painful sight, so Good-night, Sir Famish! You may cheat yourself into the belief that you've made a meal, but depend on it your progeny—and it threatens to be numerous—will cry aloud and rue the day" (Meredith, *Feverel* 479). Then he assures Ripton that he will stop Richard's duel: "Time enough tomorrow. He's safe enough while he's here. I'll stop it tomorrow" (479). Not only does Adrian fail to stop the duel, we never learn why, because Blandish does not mention him. He goes to bed and vanishes, like Lear's Fool, who goes to bed at noon and leaves the madness to carry on without him; or like a quotation, which summons the will of another's utterance only to banish it again, leaving the reader to assess the dimensions of the rupture, and to leap across it.

Chapter Five

If: Aesthetics and Ideology Revisited

Ethnology, *n.* [1.] The science that treats of the various tribes of Man, as robbers, thieves, swindlers, dunces, lunatics, idiots and ethnologists. [2.] A science that recognizes the difference between a Chinaman and a Nigger, but is oblivious to the difference between a gentleman and a blackguard. (Bierce, “Ethnology,” numerals in original)

1. Wisdom, Folly, and Ethnology

The Devil’s Dictionary has served implicitly as a structural device for this dissertation. Bierce’s lexicographical anatomy of folly illuminates facets of the attitude I take as my subject: an ambivalent conception of the human, especially of ethics and intellection, premised on a constitutively human propensity for error of various kinds. The epigraph to this chapter being not merely illustrative, but also inflammatory, however, I think it necessary to begin the chapter by fronting the devil directly. Bierce’s first definition of “ethnology” articulates wise folly from a “comfortable corner” like Adrian Harley’s in *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*: from this perspective all humanity is a pageant of fools and knaves, and Bierce’s clever Menippean twist classes the classifier, the ethnologist himself, among them (Meredith 34). The second definition exhibits starkly one of the risks of the wise-foolish perspective: a humorous indifference to the consequences of folly, an indifference similar to Hans Meyrick’s, which was discussed in Chapter Three. The second definition associates ethnology with derogatory racial classification, and implies that ethical distinctions are of greater importance than ethnic ones, but does not

necessarily challenge the terms it deploys, and quite possibly forgives them. Bierce's word "recognizes" does not clearly distance his lexicographer from the ontological categories ostensibly belonging to the ethnologist, though he may mimic them parodically. The attitude of wise folly, by rendering definite wisdom inaccessible, can forgive too much. If ethnology itself is folly, like the human pursuit of knowledge in general, and if codifying knowledge about peoples and cultures is a dead end because the true categories of the human are robbers, thieves, swindlers, and so on, then there seems to be no reason to attempt to know others responsibly. Real knowledge lies only in the cynic's universal derogation. Retreating to that cynicism allows one to evade or conceal ethical problems, just as Daniel Deronda attempts to compensate for his unfavourable opinion of most Jews by thinking ill of Christians proportionately. Misanthropy is not necessarily better than more specific prejudice, and can comfortably contain it.

In Bierce's two definitions the discourse of wise folly double-voices the discourse of ethnology, casting ethnology in a bad light. By stating baldly that ethnology is "A science that recognizes the difference between a Chinaman and a Nigger," Bierce bares the kind of logic that Edward Said critiques in *Orientalism*: the ethnological discourse of Orientalism is premised on the inferiority of the other, and generates an archive of knowledge that perpetuates these premises. The ideology of wise folly, though it may find expression in satire, is not in itself likely to motivate engaged critique like Said's—it is an ideology of the shrug, Adrian's most characteristic gesture: "Whenever the Wise Youth encountered a mental difficulty he instinctively lifted his shoulders to equal altitudes, to show that he had no doubt there was a balance in the case,—plenty to be said on both sides, which was the same to him as a definite solution" (178). Yet my interest in the practices of wise folly lies not in the ideology of wise

folly for its own sake, but in its dialogic functions when performed through writing, especially in the realist novel, where this performance is at its most fully developed.

Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* enacts, like Bierce's definition, an encounter between ideologies, including ideologies of wise folly and of hegemonic knowledge. Unlike Bierce's definition, Kipling's narrative renders all means of knowing suspect and all statements of fact uncertain. Though *Kim* does not directly question problematic knowledge claims, it declines to offer a stable position from which sure knowledge can be produced, and it dramatizes diverse positions and approaches to knowledge in an inconclusive dialogue. Mark Kinkead-Weekes reads *Kim* similarly, as "the product of a peculiar tension between different ways of seeing," though he attempts to resolve this tension and attributes it to Kipling's fleeting transcendence of himself and his allegiances (233). In contrast, I will emphasize the lack of resolution in *Kim*, the openness which creates a space for the reader in all one's difference from Kipling. Reading *Kim*'s dialogue, one discovers the limits of various claims to knowledge and also to ignorance, claims which compete on the field of Kim's development. Kim's own position in the dialogue is dynamic; it modifies and is modified by the positions of the adults Kim encounters.

The ways of knowing in the novel can be arranged between two poles. While for Jesse Oak Taylor the curator of the Lahore Museum represents an epistemology of "rule" that is based on European empiricism and that seeks to generate knowledge about India in order to master it, Teshoo Lama represents an epistemology of "liberation" in his Buddhist denial of the substance of the phenomenal world (54). Taylor locates Kim in an epistemological "third space" that he associates with aestheticism, a space "constituted through sensory perception and delight in the 'untranscended materiality' of the world" (54). This tripartite framework reflects the conflict of the novel, in which the young Kim is torn between duty to the India Survey and loyalty to the

lama; between his European and native identities; between, crudely, East and West. Yet no one in *Kim* inhabits this structure straightforwardly, especially not Kim, and Taylor's epistemologies of rule and of liberation, though useful as reference points, are both complicated by the narrative.

Kim uses the resources of wise folly to undertake its critique of knowledge. These resources include those we have examined in previous chapters, especially ambivalent gnomic utterances, *pharmakoi*, and a young male protagonist whose education is problematized. The purpose of this chapter is, in part, to bring the concerns of the previous chapters to bear on the large question underlying this project: how readers, in the aesthetic apprehension of reading, may productively negotiate our own ideological distance from discourses, texts, authors, places, times, while also apprehending with as much granularity as possible the apparent design of works instead of assimilating them to our prior understanding. This question is a version of the ethnological one that Kipling and Said both make especially insistent: how does one learn about the other without overwriting the other through one's methods of knowing? Although canonical British realist novels are artifacts of the *hegemon*, and therefore the relationship between a reader and such a novel is significantly different from the relationship between an imperial ethnologist and a colonized people, there is nevertheless a power differential in the diachronic dialogue of reading, in which either the voice of the reader or the voice of the text may drown out the other. We will return to the dialogue of reading at the end of this chapter, which also serves as a conclusion to the project by reasserting its argument: first, that the realist novel, by virtue of its form, enables the negotiation of difference, makes this negotiation part of its design, and is therefore capable of participating dialogically in critique instead of merely serving as an object for it; and, second, that my statements about the form of realist novels can only ever be

expressions of my own aesthetic apprehension, my own readings, shaped by my perception of texts and those perceptions which other readers have shared.

For the following discussion of Kipling, the binary of wisdom and folly will need, once again, to be remapped. The story of Kim's service to the imperial Survey of India concerns the specialized knowledge and skills that he acquires and that his fellow agents possess, and in this context to be a fool is usually to be ignorant or incompetent—to make poor strategic decisions, to lack necessary information, to fail to recognize that lack, to disseminate information tactlessly, to blunder. The closest one finds in *Kim* to a gnomic formulation of the thesis of wise folly is a remark made by Mahbub Ali, horse trader and agent of the Survey, as he reflects on his first encounter with the British:

“When first I dealt with Sahibs, . . . I did not know how greatly they were fools, and this made me wroth. As thus—” and he told Kim a tale of an expression, misused in all innocence, that doubled Kim up with mirth. “Now I see, however,”—he exhaled smoke slowly—“that it is with them as with all men—in certain matters they are wise, and in others most foolish. Very foolish it is to use the wrong word to a stranger; for though the heart may be clean of offence, how is the stranger to know that? He is more like to search truth with a dagger.”

(Kipling, *Kim* 121)¹

Mahbub's recognition of the mixture of wisdom and folly in “all men” accepts the inevitability of folly in order to mitigate it with caution: he is not advocating that one know that one knows nothing, but that one know what one doesn't know. Practising this caution involves being alert to cultural and linguistic differences, which are pervasive in the heterogeneous society Kipling depicts, and which provide occasions for folly. The narrator himself considers the fact of

¹ Parenthetical citations refer to the Norton edition of *Kim*.

linguistic difference when he omits the offending expression: how could the narrator render the expression in mannered English, as he does the rest of Kim and Mahbub's speech, while preserving its error? The alternative would be to render the expression in its original language, with or without an explanation for the reader who does not have the requisite linguistic knowledge to understand both the intended and the received meanings. By omitting the expression, the narrator conspicuously rejects these options, and, excluding all readers from the joke that Mahbub and Kim share, imitates the lines that Mahbub is drawing between different communities of knowledge. Mahbub advises Kim, "Therefore, in one situate as thou art, it particularly behoves thee to remember this with both kinds of faces. Among Sahibs, never forgetting thou art a Sahib; among the folk of Hind, always remembering thou art—," and trails off as he realizes he cannot classify Kim's other face (121). Mahbub's advice echoes Kipling's chapter epigraph, the first and last stanza of his poem "The Two-Sided Man," in which the speaker thanks "Allah Who gave me two / Separate sides to my head" (111). This imagery of doubleness lends itself to articulating the paradox of wise folly, but Mahbub does not quite employ it to that end. He implies that it is possible to cultivate different roles, each relying on different kinds of insider knowledge, and to choose the best role to play in a particular group.

Similar advice is provided by Colonel Creighton, an Anglo-Indian ethnologist of the Survey and another of Kim's mentors: "thou art a Sahib and the son of a Sahib. Therefore, do not at any time be led to condemn the black men. I have known boys newly entered into the service of the Government who feigned not to understand the talk or the customs of black men. Their pay was cut for ignorance. There is no sin so great as ignorance. Remember this" (102). I will bracket for the moment the import of Creighton's word "feigned" and note that his assertion about the sin of ignorance makes understanding the customs of others into an ethical imperative.

As an ethnologist, this understanding is his speciality; as a military officer and an agent of the Survey, he employs his understanding in service of imperial intelligence. Creighton embodies the collusion between ethnological knowledge and imperial power that Said critiques and the “epistemology of rule” that Taylor describes (Said, Introduction 32).

On a larger scale, *Kim* itself is ethnological and invites the reader to participate in its ethnology, to join the community of knowledge to which Kim, Mahbub, Creighton, Lurgan and others belong. Kipling’s Indian fictions seem to offer us the cultural reality of the subcontinent, with a persuasiveness of representation that Patrick Williams has termed the “Kipling effect” (34). Even *Kim*, however, generally considered Kipling’s most achieved novel, abounds with examples of ethnic stereotypes and stock information from the Orientalist archive, and as Said and others have shown, Kipling’s vision of India in *Kim* is tendentiously distorted. Preoccupied with the imperial rivalry between Britain and Russia, for instance, *Kim* downplays Indian resistance to the British.² Yet when the narrator makes the dubious claim that “All hours of the twenty-four are alike to Orientals,” he purports to offer acquired knowledge, and additional weight accrues to this claim because of the novel’s concern with the acquisition of knowledge about categories of persons (Kipling, *Kim* 26). Like Meredith’s gnomic utterances about Celts, Kipling’s assertion extends across the analogy between diegesis and historical reality to stake a claim on the reader’s reality, but, unlike Meredith’s gnomes, which remain examples of the witty speech that he treats with irony, Kipling’s ethnography is framed and potentially authorized by the discipline of ethnology to which Creighton belongs.³ On one level *Kim* seeks to incorporate an implied white British reader into this discipline, teaching this reader about India. Said suggests *Kim* “is expressly designed as a novel to show how a white sahib can enjoy life in this

² See Edward Said in the Penguin introduction to *Kim*, Ann Parry, and A. Michael Matin.

³ In a notable essay, Noel Annan identifies Kipling’s interest in society, especially as it is composed of “in-groups,” as sociological, comparing him to Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Vilfredo Pareto.

lush complexity” (Introduction 42). There are things one must understand about the natives, it is intimated, lest one commit the sin of ignorance or the kind of folly Mahbub describes.

Yet it is not simply the possession or lack of knowledge that is of ethical importance in this novel. Within the context of the Indian Survey in *Kim*, right action is a *techne*, a masterable art that entails expert knowledge but is not reducible to sheer knowledge or *episteme*, and it is this *techne* that occupies the position of wisdom in contrast to the folly that consists in failing to master the *techne*. This disciplinary wisdom is similar to that outlined in Kipling’s poem “If,” which defines didactically a series of antithetical capabilities that, exercised in measure, qualify the poem’s addressee to “be a Man, my son!” (32). The speaker does not command, “Trust yourself when all men doubt you, / But make allowance for their doubting, too.” He posits a condition—“*If you can* trust yourself when all men doubt you, / But make allowance for their doubting, too”—and promises a sequel: manhood and ownership of the world (3-4).⁴ The effect is to provide, not a series of maxims, but a portrait of a hypothetical man with certain powers of action and reserve, an expert at a certain kind of living.⁵

At times this ethics looks like that which Socrates perversely advances in the *Hippias Minor*. Treating virtue and wisdom as *technai*, on analogy with mathematics and crafts, Socrates deconstructs Hippias’s distinction between the good man and the bad man. The expert geometer, the one most capable of making a true geometrical statement, is also the one most capable of making a false geometrical statement, because he knows what is true and what is false. The best geometer is also the worst geometer. The most honest man, by the same logic, is also the most deceitful man, the one most capable of telling the truth, and therefore of telling a lie; and the

⁴ This complication, I think, is part of what makes the speaker of “If” a “better Polonius,” in Catherine Robson’s words, or at least a more nuanced one.

⁵ Cf. John Kucich’s discussion of sadomasochistic “magical groups” in Kipling: the disciplined balancing of antithetical powers in “If” resembles the configurations of dominance and submission that for Kucich structure the omnipotence of the Secret Service (160-68).

good man is also the bad man. Because Socrates's target is Hippias's easy notion that there is such a thing as a categorically honest man like Achilles as opposed to a categorically deceitful man like Odysseus, Socrates treats virtue as a matter of the power to do good, ignoring the question of whether the one with that power does in fact do good instead of evil, and under what circumstances. The argument is a deliberate attempt to drive Hippias to an *aporia*.⁶ Yet the logic of this dialogue, in all its irony, captures something about the way Kipling's characters judge each other.

When Kim recounts to Mahbub how he twice made use of his foreknowledge of the Second Afghan War to impress an audience, Mahbub declares, "That was foolishness. . . . News is not meant to be thrown about like dung-cakes, but used sparingly—like *bhang*" (*Kim* 114). Kim concurs, "So I think now, and moreover, it did me no sort of good. But that was very long ago" (115). Kim is learning the necessity, not only of knowing, but of expertise in knowing. Yet Kim then proceeds to enact, wilfully, exactly the kind of foolishness Mahbub will later describe in the same chapter, the foolishness of using the wrong word in the wrong company:

"They say at Nucklao that no Sahib must tell a black man that he has made a fault."

Mahbub's hand shot into his bosom, for to call a Pathan a "black man" (*kala admi*) is a blood-insult. Then he remembered and laughed. "Speak, Sahib. Thy black man hears." (115)

In this case Kipling provides the Hindi-Urdu term along with its translation, informing the reader of Kim's exact infraction. Like the mysterious "expression, misused in all innocence" in Mahbub's anecdote, "*kala admi*" nearly provokes violence (121). What prevents this violence is

⁶ See R. E. Allen's analysis of the *Hippias Minor* as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the notion of virtue as *techné* (Plato 25-29).

Kim's guilt, not his innocence. Kim knows that Mahbub knows that Kim knows better; he trusts Mahbub to "remember" that he is not an ignorant or insulting sahib, merely acting like one, and Mahbub's remembering transmutes the insult into an impertinent joke. Kim goes on to say, "But . . . I am *not* a Sahib" (115). There is an ironic echo in this exchange of Creighton's advice "do not at any time be led to condemn the black men," which, because Creighton speaks it in Urdu, may well contain the same term that Kim uses to taunt Mahbub—the injunction against contempt, in a certain context, is an expression of contempt (102). Kim's mastery of cultural performance looks like the sin of ignorance: he "feign[s] not to understand . . . the customs of black men" (102). Yet Creighton cannot possibly mean that it is wrong simply to pretend to be ignorant: feigning is not the problem. Shortly after delivering this advice Creighton chides Kim for alluding to an earlier exploit by saying, "Much is gained by forgetting, little brother" (102). The maximatic language of Kim's mentors tends to coagulate into isolated gnomic puzzles instead of blending into a coherent system of principles, and one way to perceive the coherence underlying Kim's imperial education is to recognize its similarity to the hypothetical technology of manhood in "If." If Kim can know but not be blind with knowing, and know when it is better to forget, he will be the kind of man the agents of the Survey want him to be. If he cannot, he will be a fool.

2. Playing the Game

Kim's taunting of Mahbub does not in itself exemplify the novel's questioning of knowledge: the incident is premised on a fact about Pathans, which the narrator steps in to explain in his ethnographic voice. The ethics I have outlined is comparatively stable, deploying the poles of wisdom and folly with complexity, but without the vertigo that wise folly requires.

Yet the incident helps us to perceive a space between knowing and the performance of knowing, which allows the performance to come loose from questions of knowledge, to become more important than knowledge itself. For instance, though ethnology does function directly as a discourse of power in *Kim*, it is also a ruse that allows Creighton to play the “very foolish Sahib, who is a Colonel Sahib without a regiment” (100). Creighton uses knowledge to seem foolish, to disguise his political power as an agent of the Survey by seeming to be a mere scholar, and the status of the ethnological knowledge itself is accordingly ambiguous. Creighton’s ethnological comment to Father Victor about Kim’s “Red Bull” fetish, for example, does not simply cast Kim as an object of knowledge. Father Victor not being part of the secret service, Creighton must give Victor a plausible alternative explanation for his investment in Kim:

“You see, as an ethnologist, the thing’s very interesting to me. I’d like to make a note of it for some Government work that I’m doing. The transformation of a regimental badge like your Red Bull into a sort of fetish that the boy follows is very interesting.”

“But I can’t thank you enough.”

“There’s one thing you can do. All we Ethnological men are as jealous as jackdaws of one another’s discoveries. They’re of no interest to anyone but ourselves, of course, but you know what book-collectors are like. Well, don’t say a word, directly or indirectly, about the Asiatic side of the boy’s character—his adventures and his prophecy, and so on. I’ll worm them out of the boy later on and—you see?”

“I do. Ye’ll make a wonderful account of it. Never a word will I say to anyone till I see it in print.”

“Thank you. That goes straight to an ethnologist’s heart.” (97)

The joke here is that Father Victor will never see anything about Kim in print—not by Creighton, at least. Creighton is performing ethnology in order to secure Victor’s discretion without telling him anything. The pleonastic “sort of” and the repetition of “very interesting” suggest a pedantic mannerism, and Creighton identifies himself as an ethnologist three times. In a move that resembles Bierce’s, he also makes a statement about ethnologists that is similar in form to an ethnological statement and that relies on similar epistemological assumptions: “All we Ethnological men are jealous as jackdaws” claims total knowledge of a group in much the same way “All the hours of the twenty-four are alike to Orientals” does. Creighton inhabits the category of the known that he has invoked, and then invites Victor into the knowing community he has thereby invented: “*you know* what book-collectors are like.” Creighton thus authors, authorizes, and disseminates knowledge about himself in order to trick Victor into thinking he knows something. Creighton the spy creates Creighton the ethnologist by deploying the discourse of ethnology deceptively.

When a text represents a character being duped, it arms the reader against similar mistakes. This episode renders the language of ethnology opaque, preparing us to see it as a tool that can be turned to ends other than its usual ones. Of course, in performing ethnology Creighton really does ethnology, just as Mahbub Ali really sells horses and Lurgan Sahib really nurses gems. In a rare foray into Creighton’s consciousness, the narrator confirms that Creighton is genuinely invested in ethnology for its own sake and aspires to be a Fellow of the Royal Society. The narrator also suggests, however, that this ambition is comically misdirected, that Creighton is “bombard[ing]” the wrong organization with “monographs on strange Asiatic cults and unknown customs”: “By all right and reason, it was the Royal Geographical that should have

appealed to him, but men are as chancy as children in their choice of playthings” (148). Such a statement does not altogether take Creighton seriously, despite Said’s reading of the character, and the humour at Creighton’s expense reinforces the difference between his desire for ethnological knowledge and his performance of ethnological discourse (Introduction 33).

Furthermore, the narrator infantilizes Creighton through a kind of knowledge akin to the Colonel’s, a categorical knowledge of children and their ways from which the narrator fashions an aphorism that claims knowledge of men, including Creighton. Throughout the narrative, the narrator surveys the land that Kim traverses, describing it and sharing information about it, making claims to knowledge of Indian traits that draw from and contribute to the Orientalist archive, and in this way the narrator is analogous to Creighton. The narrator is not allied with Creighton in the novel’s dialogue, however, and in this instance employs a discourse similar in form to Creighton’s, with similar epistemological assumptions, in order to create distance from Creighton and his ethnology.

The rulers’ way of knowing is not inherently an epistemology of rule. Nor is it theirs alone. Proverbs, for example, form a parallel discourse, one more frequently associated with native wisdom. Often the proverbs concern the nature of races or castes, which makes them nearly identical in form to ethnological statements: “Never speak to a white man till he is fed” (Kipling, *Kim* 72). Proverbs can thus consolidate power much as ethnological claims do. The men in the dowager’s escort exchange proverbs while addressing Kim. The first man says, “Only the devils and the English walk to and fro without reason,” and the second responds, “Never make friends with the Devil, a Monkey, or a Boy. No man knows what they will do next” (69). Kim is not impressed: “Kim turned a scornful back—he did not want to hear the old story how the Devil played with the boys and repented of it—and walked idly across country” (69). Kim is

“cast[ing] about for means of amusement” (68). He is playing. The men, meanwhile, are undertaking a mastering of children through adult knowledge that operates on similar assumptions and through similar mechanisms to the mastering of “the Orient” through European knowledge.⁷ The second man expresses the very unpredictability of Kim in order to ascribe it to his age and gender, to make it knowledge and therefore predictable: Kim plays because he is a boy. The man’s remarks about Kim resemble the Reverend Bennett’s about Teshoo Lama, although Bennett uses the categories of Orientalism, not of age: “My experience is that one can never fathom the Oriental mind” (77). This is a paradoxical claim to mastery over the “Oriental mind”: if Bennett knows it is unfathomable then he has, in a sense, fathomed it.⁸ Creighton himself says, “The more one knows about natives the less can one say what they will or won’t do” (96). On one hand, this claim functions much like Bennett’s. To know the native is to know that the native is unpredictable. Father Victor, however, takes the aphorism as an admission of ignorance, replying, “That’s consol[ing]—from the head of the Ethnological Survey” (96). Kipling does not foreclose the possibility that Creighton’s knowledge is genuinely limited; that, as it becomes ever more certain, it becomes ever less applicable.

In scorning the guards’ proverbial generalizations, Kim seems to be aware of their function. His response, turning and walking away, is a suitably nonverbal rebuttal, a gestural escape from a knowing discourse. Although it does not follow that the novel’s other generalizations about boys are ironic, this scene stages Kim’s resistance to a discourse of knowledge that other characters, including the narrator, employ. The narrator tells us, “Boylike,

⁷ See Sue Walsh, who traces this analogy in post-colonial criticism and complicates it (30-50).

⁸ Sara Suleri points out a similar paradox in her critique of “alterity” in colonial studies: “Once the disturbing centrality of alterity has been established as a key area of interpretative concern, a rehearsal of its protean manifestations leads to a theoretical repetitiveness that finally entrenches rather than displaces the rigidity of the self/other binarism governing traditional discourse on colonialism” (11); “Much like the category of the exotic in the colonial narratives of the prior century, contemporary critical theory names the other in order that it need not be further known” (13).

if an acquaintance had a scheme, Kim was quite ready with one of his own; and, boylike, he had really thought for as much as twenty minutes at a time of his father's prophecy" (17). As Kim eludes the categories applied to him throughout the narrative, failing continually to be fully explicable, he reveals that the category of "boy" is more stable and knowable than the individuals it encompasses.

Proverbs are not always tools of mastery in *Kim*, however: they can also establish community. The Jat farmer Kim encounters embraces his proverbial identity. When the farmer wishes to repay Kim for treating his sick son, Kim recites to him the proverb of the Jat and the King's elephants: "The Jat stood on his dunghill and the King's elephants went by. 'O driver,' said he, 'what will you sell those little donkeys for?'" (159). Instead of making a general ethnological claim, this proverb aims to communicate knowledge about a caste by deploying a type character allegorically. It implies that Jats overstate their means and understate the value of what they seek to purchase. The Jat responds with "a roar of laughter": "It is the saying of my own country—the very talk of it. So are we Jats all" (159). Kim wins over the farmer by demonstrating that he knows him in the same way the Jat and his community ostensibly know themselves.

Similarly when R17, alias Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, says, "I am Bengali—a fearful man," Kim replies with a proverb that appears to confirm Hurree's admission: "God made the Hare and the Bengali. What shame?" (187). Fearful, obese, oily, officious, hypocritical, malapropist, and excessively proud of his British education, Hurree instantiates a stereotype of the comic Bengali babu. He is citing part of this stereotype, though, whenever he refers to himself as fearful, which suggests that to some degree he chooses to be what he is, making use of the proverbial knowledge that exists about him. When Kim warns him to use English more

discreetly, Hurree says, “I am only Babu showing off my English to you. All we Babus talk English to show off,” and “fling[s] his shoulder-cloth jauntily” (154). Said, acknowledging that Hurree is intelligent, skilled at his work, even “lovable and admirable,” writes that “there remains in Kipling’s portrait of him the grimacing stereotype of the ontologically funny native, hopelessly trying to be like ‘us’” (Introduction 33). Precisely because Hurree is such a good agent, however, ontology is difficult to isolate from performance. U. C. Knoepfelmacher discusses Hurree’s “consummate skills as a confidence man” in his encounter with the two spies from Russia: Hurree knows the spies expect a babu to represent the “monstrous hybridism of East and West,” so he gives them exactly that (Knoepfelmacher 923; Kipling, *Kim* 199). He pretends to get drunk and “thickly treasonous,” “sp[eaking] in terms of sweeping indecency of a Government which had forced upon him a white man’s education and neglected to supply him with a white man’s salary” (198). After Hurree, all deference, leads the spies on a trek through the Himalayan foothills that ensures their cover is blown, we find him, “all Babudom laid aside, smoking at noon on a cot” (223).

Still, as Walsh notes, Hurree’s character is not entirely a performance (27). He can walk great distances over hills and through “a storm to which nine Englishmen out of ten would have given full right of way,” but his girth and oily skin are repeatedly emphasized to create physical humour (Kipling, *Kim* 197). His English is clumsy even in his own narrated consciousness. His ostensible agnosticism and his invocations of Herbert Spencer thinly disguise his belief in the occult. Perhaps *Kim* best expresses the paradox of Hurree: “He tricked them [the spies]. He lied to them like a Bengali. They give him a *chit* (a testimonial). He makes them a mock at the risk of his life—I never would have gone down to them after the pistol-shots—and then he says he is a fearful man . . . And he *is* a fearful man” (234, ellipses and italics in original). Indeed, Hurree

first approaches the spies with “a heart beating against his tonsils” (197). The ellipsis in Kim’s thought suggests that he is struggling to reconcile the falsehood and the truth of Hurree’s repeated admissions of fearfulness: the Babu *is* fearful, but his fearfulness is simultaneously an act that he uses to disguise his real capacity for bravery. With the phrase “lied . . . like a Bengali,” Kim attempts to fall back on stereotype, but the stereotypes that Hurree enacts have now become irreconcilable.

As Hurree shows us, knowledge claims in *Kim* can be used performatively while also happening sometimes and in some ways to be true. Walsh argues that the irony of Hurree’s characterization creates radically different possibilities for interpretation, “mak[ing] it difficult to read Hurree as simply lying” but “demand[ing] a conception of language in which words do not necessarily mean what they say” (26, 28). We are likely to differ from Kipling in judging what constitutes true knowledge, but *Kim* tends to encourage a critical approach to knowledge and claims to knowledge more than it tends to establish particular truths. The narrator will occasionally present blatant misinformation and expect us to recognize it as such. For instance, the narrator describes Hurree’s drunken spectacle as it would have appeared to the spies. There is no explicit sign that he is only pretending until he collapses under a tree and a brief foray into his thoughts reveals that he is not really unconscious. When he awakens we are told “he was racked with a headache—penitent, and volubly afraid that in his drunkenness he might have been indiscreet,” and we understand that he is “present[ing] himself” *as if* this were the case (Kipling, *Kim* 199). Likewise, when Mahbub Ali visits a prostitute after giving Kim an incriminating document, the narrator says:

It was an utterly foolish thing to do; because they [Mahbub and the woman] fell to drinking perfumed brandy against the Law of the Prophet, and Mahbub grew

wonderfully drunk, and the gates of his mouth were loosened, and he pursued the Flower of Delight with the feet of intoxication till he fell flat among the cushions, where the Flower of Delight, aided by a smooth-faced Kashmiri pundit, searched him from head to foot most thoroughly. (23)

Only after Mahbub has awakened is it revealed that he has orchestrated the scene: “Asiatics,” the narrator announces, “do not wink when they have outmanoeuvred an enemy, but . . . Mahbub Ali . . . came very near to it” (24). Having found no document, Mahbub’s enemies conclude he is not the man they are looking for, which is evidently what Mahbub planned all along to accomplish by his “foolish” conduct. With the reference to a wink that does not occur, I suggest, the narrator winks at the reader. Kipling’s misleading narration encourages us to suspect direct statements of fact, to question our knowledge about characters, and to be prepared to revise this knowledge.

We have seen that various discourses of knowledge, including proverbial and ethnological dicta, can emerge from an epistemology that allows sure knowledge of stable categories; that characters may use these discourses to assert mastery over others, but also to establish or disguise their own identity; and that the function of these discourses is distinct from their truth value. Such discourses are integral to the Great Game in *Kim*, the struggle between Britain and Russia for information about and, ultimately, imperial possession of India. As the metaphor of the game suggests, bodies of knowledge about races, castes, and religions become a firm framework, a set of rules binding the activities of each side. Kim plays the game of “dressing-up” with Lurgan in preparation for the greater game: “Lurgan Sahib . . . would explain by the half-hour together how such and such a caste talked, or walked, or coughed, or spat, or sneezed, and, since ‘hows’ matter little in this world, the ‘why’ of everything” (134). Such

detailed knowledge may, of course, be based on valid observations and explanations, but it is the total structure of knowledge claims and their underlying epistemology that compose the Great Game.

Through the lens of the Game, Kipling presents a vision of India as a chess board and of its inhabitants as pieces with precisely defined attributes. Playing the game requires knowing these attributes, understanding the rules. Yet there are no players who are not themselves subject to the rules—these pieces move themselves and each other. As Don Randall argues in his Foucauldian reading of the Great Game, “Disciplinary power does not flow vectorally from the upper to the lower echelons of the social body. It is relayed through a multiplicity of subjects; it circulates through all social levels. In a social context such as one finds in *Kim*, the disciplines may serve, therefore, to enable transgressions of the power divide inscribed by imperialist intervention, may serve to unbalance the dyad of dominance and submission” (134). I am arguing, similarly, that though the Game is a product of the empire its rules are administered not from above but through the structure and epistemology of the Game. Imperial discourses of knowledge form this structure, as do local discourses of knowledge based on ethnic, social, and religious categories. Kim clearly perceives the resulting machinery after the Russian spy strikes the lama, thereby enraging Kim and scattering the Hillmen: “this collapse of their Great Game (Kim wondered to whom they would report it), this panicky bolt into the night, had come about through no craft of Hurree’s or contrivance of Kim’s, but simply, beautifully, and inevitably as the capture of Mahbub’s *faquir*-friends by the zealous young policeman at Umballa” (Kipling, *Kim* 207). Recall that the capture of the fake *faquirs* is not altogether an accident: Mahbub, knowing an English official would investigate the threat of a theft, simply intimates the threat of a theft to an English official. The beautiful inevitability is not a providence but the consequence

of everybody performing their social, political, and cultural roles as expected. Kim finally tires of this game world when he and the lama return from the Hills, wishing that “someone duly authorized would only take delivery” of the documents he has acquired from the Russian spies; then “the Great Game might play itself for aught he then cared” (225). Surely it would continue to do so.

Play in *Kim* is hard to separate from work and education. Kim’s time in the barracks school is work, but appears to him to be without purpose or form: “The man explained something or other with white lines on a black board for at least half an hour, and Kim continued his interrupted nap” (86); “the schoolmaster caught him after breakfast, thrust a page of meaningless characters under his nose, gave them senseless [names], and whacked him without reason” (91). On the other hand, when the schoolmaster orders Kim to play, Kim promptly runs off and dictates a letter to the lama, which appears to be a far more productive activity than schoolwork was. Kim plays the jewel game with Lurgan to hone his memory for details, or the game of “dressing-up” to learn how to disguise himself. Kim’s natural mimicry suggests that Lurgan’s dress-up game is merely a supervised and more intensive version of an activity Kim has always enjoyed: he is always playing, always learning, whether or not he is working. At the start of the novel, Kim is already a messenger for Mahbub Ali, already a player in the Great Game. And he already seems to have mastered imperial knowledge of the world. His play on Zam-Zammah re-enacts his version of history and defines for him his Muslim and Hindu companions: “All Mussalmans fell off Zam-Zammah long ago!”; “The Hindus fell off Zam-Zammah too” (6). Similarly, Kim’s seemingly innate misogyny seems to be something he has picked up from Mahbub. When Mahbub assigns Kim the mission of delivering a message to Creighton, Kim thinks, “Surely there is a woman behind this” (25). The narrator’s claim that

“Kim’s limitations were as curious and sudden as his expansions” seems generally to be true: we cannot account for the origin of many of his assumptions and beliefs (73).

The narrator balks attempts to construct a narrative of Kim’s intellectual development by twice eliding details of Kim’s education at St. Xavier’s. He writes: “The country-born and bred boy has his own manners and customs, which do not resemble those of any other land; and his teachers approach him by roads which an English master would not understand. Therefore, you would scarcely be interested in Kim’s experiences as a St. Xavier’s boy among two or three hundred precocious youths, most of whom had never seen the sea” (105). And, later: “The record of a boy’s education interests few save his parents, and, as you know, Kim was an orphan. It is written in the books of St Xavier’s in Partibus that a report of Kim’s progress was forwarded at the end of each term to Colonel Creighton and to Father Victor” (138-39). On both occasions the narrator addresses us directly, a rare device in this novel, and defines for us the limits of our desire to know. Since Kim’s education is so central to the novel, there would seem to be some teasing going on here. Furthermore, with the reference to the “books of St Xavier’s,” the narrator’s knowledge also appears limited; the narrator is seen to be a human collecting documentary evidence, and after Kim passes his surveying exam at the age of fifteen, the “record is silent” (139).

What Kim seems most to gain from his formal education, aside from discretion, literacy, various practical skills, and a better mastery of categorical knowledge than he already had, is an awareness of the power that knowledge enables. Kim grasps the logic of St Xavier’s: “One must never forget that one is a Sahib, and that some day, when examinations are passed, one will command natives. Kim made a note of this, for he began to understand where examinations led” (107). As Kim learns the imperial epistemology, he also learns its function, which he notes, but

neither condemns nor approves. The lack of judgment here is both crucial and representative, because Kim through most of the novel does not express an opinion of the Game. In fact, his reasons for playing it at all are only rarely apparent. At the beginning of the novel, before Kim even knows what the Game is aside from a general kind of “intrigue,” “what he loved was the game for its own sake” (5). Later, other motives develop: after Kim taunts Mahbub with the phrase “*kala admi*,” he says, “I see my road all clear before me to a good service” (115). Kim’s loyalty to this service is itself motivated to a degree by “the clean pride (it can be a deadly pitfall, none the less) of Departmental praise—ensnaring praise from an equal of work appreciated by fellow-workers” (184). Kim is also clearly motivated by an affection for his superiors in the service and, especially, for the lama, who funds his education. Finally, he “play[s] for larger things [than money]—the sheer excitement and the sense of power” (43). At no point, however, does Kim conceive of his activity as politically purposeful. He is impressed by the scope of the Game and wants to play it well, but he acknowledges no investment in its outcome. As Said writes, “for Kim the Great Game cannot be perceived in all its complex patterns, although it can be fully enjoyed as a sort of extended prank. The scenes where Kim banters, bargains, repartees with his elders, friendly and hostile alike, are indications of *Kipling’s* seemingly inexhaustible fund of boyish enjoyment in the sheer momentary pleasure of playing a game, any sort of game” (Introduction 13, my italics). Said’s shift from Kim’s play to Kipling’s suggests the way that Kim, the other agents of the Survey, their author, and the reader who receives the author’s ethnography might collude in creating and perpetuating the Game’s structure of knowledge within both the diegesis and the historical reality to which it is analogized. It is part of the wise folly of *Kim*, however, that play is also the means of undoing the discursive work of the Game.

3. Ignorance, Indifference, Irresponsibility

In order to place Kim's play in a context different from that of the Game, it will be necessary to examine the alternatives to the Game's structure of knowledge. Teshoo Lama represents one, espousing an epistemology predicated on his own ideology of ignorance. For the lama true ignorance—not willful disregard for knowledge or sham forgetting but the failure to know—is a consequence of being bound to the Wheel of Things, to phenomenal existence. The statement of the lama's quest is an admission of ignorance that makes the quest possible: "I know nothing—nothing do I know[—]but I go to free myself from the Wheel of Things by a broad and open road" (Kipling, *Kim* 11).⁹ Only seemingly redundant, the antimetabole suggests both a lack of knowledge in the subject and a lack of substance in the object. The lama is a figure of blessed and unpretending limitation, and his discourse of ignorance tends to erode the discourses of knowledge he encounters. Barbara Black does not give him enough credit when she focuses on the lama's submission to the curator of the Lahore Museum: "In the Wonder House, wise man meets wise man; lama confronts curator, and the lama must concede to the wiser man" (241). When the lama prostrates himself before the curator, he asks: "Surely thou must know? See, I am an old man! I ask with my head between thy feet, O Fountain of Wisdom. We *know* He drew the bow! We *know* the arrow fell! We *know* the stream gushed! Where, then, is the River? My dream told me to find it. So I came. I am here. But where is the River?" (Kipling, *Kim* 12). The reiteration of "*know*" marks this as an uncharacteristic moment of weakness for the lama, whose desire to find the River has caused him to forget his deliberate acceptance of ignorance. The lama soon realizes that the curator also does not know where the River is and he re-asserts their similarity: "We are both bound, thou and I, my brother" (14). Although the lama considers his lamasery's books to be "dried pith," and seems more impressed

⁹ The Norton edition omits the hyphen. I follow the Penguin in including it.

by the collection in the museum, he ultimately shows these records to be no better for his purposes (11). The lama seeks not the knowledge of the Europeans but that “which they have not sought out,” that which the Curator also does not know (11). He quests beyond the compass of ethnological knowledge, and, eventually, beyond the circumference of the Wheel of Things.

Furthermore, the lama denies the existence of the categories that enable the kind of knowledge on which the Great Game depends, including knowledge of caste. When the lama sees the market-gardener, an Arain, he judges the man based on his appearance (not a difficult judgment—the “angry” man is “brandish[ing] a bamboo pole” at Kim and the lama): “‘Such an one,’ said the lama, disregarding the dogs, ‘is impolite to strangers, intemperate of speech and uncharitable. Be warned by his demeanour, my disciple’” (39). Kim translates this sentence into the language with which he is familiar: “thou hast said he was low-caste and discourteous” (39). But the imposition of the category is Kim’s and the lama corrects him: “Low-caste I did not say, for how can that be which is not? Afterwards he amended his discourtesy, and I forgot the offense” (39). At first the lama does unequivocally discriminate between man and woman, refusing on principle to speak to the women on the train to Umballa, but this is a behavior *he* is quick to amend. The thrust of the lama’s faith is away from the world, social and ethnic categories, knowledge, and the trappings of religion. When he raises his pen case to strike the Russian who has torn his image of the Wheel of Things, he knows he strays grievously from his Way, and stops himself.

The lama’s inconsistencies can be attributed to what he himself sees as his imperfections and to a set of practices that he subjects to revision. A more substantial problem with the lama’s quest and its epistemology of ignorance is his difficulty engaging with the phenomenal world that he has not yet escaped, which is suggested when he passes unseeing through the human

bustle of the Grand Trunk Road. The River of the Arrow that the lama seeks may be just a story, as the Curator implies when he responds to the lama's account of the River by "sadly" saying "So it is written" (12). There is always the possibility in *Kim* that the lama is merely lost in a fantasy. Most characters consider him benignly mad, including Kim, who loves him anyway. This appearance of madness results from the lama's disengagement from a world where knowledge is possible, where it is possible to verify whether he has achieved enlightenment and found his River at the end of the story or merely lost his mind and jumped into a brook.

The lama's ideology occupies the position of the *pharmakos*, the sacrificed and excluded other, with respect to the ideology of the imperial agents, especially if one reads the narrative rhetoric as finally aligning itself with the empire. The lama's commitments are fundamentally anti-ontological, while the imperial epistemology is committed to a categorical ontology, even if that ontology seems sometimes to be an excuse for performative play. The lama therefore illustrates the possibility of cutting the ties between appearances and the world—more precisely, of becoming disinterested in the world of appearances, the Wheel of Things, or, in a term the lama uses once to describe the teleological unfolding of events, the "Chain of Things" (177). This phrase echoes the occupation for which Kim is ostensibly being groomed, that of chain-man in the India Survey, responsible for measuring with chains the world whose chains the lama seeks to escape. In the lama's case, however, disinterest is also uninterest, and he is mostly an unplayful figure. One exception is the competitive streak he displays in the Himalayan foothills, where he proves much surer of foot than Kim; this is one of Teshoo's lapses, of which he later repents. Another exception is the delight he sometimes takes in the forms of his devotion. The description of the lama when he begins his ritual drawing of an image of the Wheel conjoins the language of childhood and the language of play: "simply as a child engrossed with a new game,

the lama threw back his head and began the full-throated invocation of the Doctor of Divinity ere he opens the full doctrine” (201). Yet this play, too, is troubling within the lama’s ideological framework, because it is implicated in his attachment to the image he draws, an attachment that nearly motivates him to violence when the Russian damages the image, and thereby provokes the lama’s most serious crisis of conscience.

The lama’s cultivated ignorance, however, is neither the mode of (not) knowing which the novel affirms nor the only alternative to the Great Game’s mode of knowing. There is a discourse of description in the novel’s dialogue unlike either the positive discourse of categorical knowledge or the negative discourse of ignorance. Taylor associates the “third space” between the empire’s and the lama’s epistemologies with *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism. The middle space I am identifying has less to do with the cultivated identities of aestheticism as a local historical phenomenon, but is aesthetic in that it is the space of the aesthetic judgment in the Kantian sense elucidated by Jonathan Loesberg in *A Return to Aesthetics*. Kim occasionally regards the world through a mode of strictly aesthetic apprehension, concerned with the appearance of the world as it is presented to him rather than with ontology, real purposes, or knowledge. One such aesthetic moment occurs during a dialogue between the old Rissaldar soldier and the lama about the Revolt of 1857. The dialogue itself is important here because some of the key discourses we have already seen intersect within it, so I will consider first how Kim’s aesthetic apprehension is framed by this dialogue.

Seeing the soldier’s weapon, the lama asks, “why the sword?” and the soldier, “as abashed as a child interrupted in his game of make-believe,” replies, “Oh, that was a fancy of mine—an old man’s fancy. Truly the police orders are that no man must bear weapons throughout Hind, but . . . all the constabeels hereabout know me” (47). We have seen the narrator

compare both Creighton and Teshoo Lama to children, and the narrator describes the lama as childlike on several other occasions. The lama himself says to Kim in apology for his impatience, “Surely old folk are as children” (163). These intersections between the narrator’s discourse and the lama’s allow the narrator to suggest the lama’s point of view. To the lama, the soldier’s weapon is a toy and his military merit is empty: “That strength is weakness” (49). Ignorant of the details of the Revolt and hearing the soldier speak of “the land from Delhi south awash with blood,” the lama asks, “What madness was that, then?” (47). The soldier’s loyalties are with the British, and he agrees that the Revolt was madness, but his reasons differ from the lama’s. The soldier’s reasons are political, while the lama is turning the word “madness,” so often applied to him, against the strife of a world that to him is illusory. Just as the lama’s quest is madness when viewed from outside, from his perspective political strife—any political strife—is madness. War depends on categories that do not exist to him.

This dialogue, with its references to children, play, and madness, encapsulates the tension between the lama’s epistemology and that of the soldier or the spies, who all participate in the Great Game for control of India. The meaning of the Great Game hinges on this dialogue, which brings out a suggestion of *mere* play in the ostensibly adult Game. Who is mad, childish, or playing? The lama who quests for a possibly imaginary river? Creighton and his associates who map India, draw lines, codify people, and generate knowledge? The aging Indian officer who romantically clings to the sword he used in service of the colonial power? Crucially, this question is not answered by the dialogue between the lama and the soldier, which does not reach a resolution but instead trails off, yielding to Kim’s aesthetic moment. This moment centres on an actual child who appears on the scene as if conjured by the soldier’s infantilization:

The lama's voice faltered—the periods lengthened. Kim was busy watching a grey squirrel. When the little scolding bunch of fur, close pressed to the branch, disappeared, preacher and audience were fast asleep, the old officer's strong-cut head pillowed on his arm, the lama's thrown back against the tree-bole, where it showed like yellow ivory. A naked child toddled up, stared, and, moved by some quick impulse of reverence, made a solemn little obeisance before the lama—only the child was so short and fat that it toppled over sideways, and Kim laughed at the sprawling, chubby legs. (49-50)

Kipling emphasizes the appearance of the bodies of his characters in this passage: the “strong-cut head” of the soldier, the “yellow ivory” head of the lama, the “sprawling, chubby legs” of the “naked child.” Significantly, Kim is not listening to the lama; he is “busy” watching first the grey squirrel and then the child. The “sprawling, chubby legs” and the “scolding bunch of fur” are not incidental synecdoche: these descriptions communicate the specificity of Kim's attention. Kim is apprehending details, not categories or purposes, and his laughter at those chubby legs suggests a less knowing kind of play than his conquest of Zam-Zammah at the beginning of the novel or any of his imperial training. The material details of this scene fill the space of the lama's silence. The crucial dialogue yields to the biological necessity of sleep and, on Kim's part, the sheer pleasure of observing the phenomenal world. Later, just as the child and squirrel disarticulate into legs and fur, the classes of people on the Grand Trunk Road become patches of colour to Kim: “It was . . . beautiful to watch the people, little clumps of red and blue and pink and white and saffron, turning aside to go to their own villages, dispersing and growing small by twos and threes across the level plain. Kim felt these things, though he could not give tongue to his feelings, and so contented himself with buying peeled sugar-cane and spitting the pith generously

about his path” (56). Although Satya Mohanty has stressed the social knowledge that enables Kim to identify various classes and professions on the Road, and Kim does do this, what we see at this point is not a young sahib categorizing, knowing, and mastering what he sees (319). Kim’s inability to articulate the beauty that the narrator expresses for him suggests that Kim’s aesthetic encounters with the phenomenal world resist the reifications of language.

The word “beautiful” is a sign of the Kantian charge in this passage, but it is the aesthetic judgment itself, not the result of the judgment, that is relevant to the practices of knowing I have been describing. In Loesberg’s view, the aesthetic is a mode of apprehending the world as if it were designed, with indifference to ontological or metaphysical questions of its actual existence or purposes, and is therefore the grounds of reading, interpreting, and theorizing. He explains the function of this indifference with reference to Kant’s examples:

Hearing a bird’s song or seeing the palace or the ocean, we must identify it as a bird’s song, a palace, or the ocean to get the effect of seeing purposiveness, and so we cannot see any of those objects without *any* regard to their concepts. But in attributing gladness to the song, we surely are also not drawing conclusions about its natural causes, about any real meaning it might have, about what the bird or even a more primary creator might intend. In this sense, we attend to its surface appearance, to which we attribute meaning, rather than to the conditions of its existence. And caring, as we do, for the attributed significance rather than for the actual causes of the song, in this sense, we are indifferent to its existence. (107, author’s emphasis)

It may appear that what I have been painting as a novelistic dialogue between two epistemologies is about to turn out to be a dialectic, with the aesthetic as the third term. The

gnomic modes of knowing, including imperial ethnology and proverbial wisdom, require an expert ability to read appearances, but usually refer these appearances to ontological categories and use their knowledge to reinforce those categories. The lama's philosophy is one of pure appearances, but on principle he does not care about those appearances, unlike Loesberg's aesthetic reader, and therefore Teshoo avoids aesthetic apprehension, passing along the Grand Trunk Road "never rais[ing] his eyes" (Kipling, *Kim* 56). In attributing to Kim something like a *flâneur* identity, Taylor associates him with *fin-de-siècle* attempts to fashion modes of being around the aesthetic. Yet Kim does not articulate, and it is not apparent that he subscribes to, an ideology of aestheticism like the one Oscar Wilde develops and performs. Aesthetics does not offer for Kim a sustained alternative to the means of knowing available to him, but an exception to them. The aesthetic judgment need not be a permanent way of seeing; it can be bounded, exercised temporarily, and its hypothetical mode lends itself to such circumscription. Often the aesthetic judgment occurs in moments—moments in which one perceives the beautiful, or the sublime, or the ridiculous. A lively sense of humour is a kind of aesthetic susceptibility: when Kim laughs at the "sprawling, chubby legs" of the toppling child, it is a way of seeing the world as if it were designed for his pleasure.

The ridiculous in particular exemplifies how one can be startled into an aesthetic apprehension that re-orders one's vision of the world, affecting one's ontological commitments even though the apprehension itself brackets ontological commitments. Loesberg identifies as aesthetic indifference the irresponsible laughter, provoked by Borges, that Foucault records in *The Order of Things*. I will reproduce here the passage from Foucault, which is pertinent not only to the role of the aesthetic in *Kim*, but to this dissertation's persistent concern with the dialogical function of humour in practices of wise folly:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—*our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a “certain Chinese encyclopaedia” in which it is written that “animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.” In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*. (xv)

Foucault’s aesthetic apprehension is not free of ideology, since to exercise a hypothetical mode of apprehension, especially to sustain it, requires an ethical irresponsibility:

What makes it [Foucault’s “project of calling into question the foundations of knowledge”] irresponsible is again what makes it aesthetic. It is distance in the manner of the artificially assumed, Kantian indifference to the object’s existence, an objectivity that matches all too well with Foucault’s pre-existent desire to see modernity as only one possible formation. And yet it remains a virtually paradigmatic objectivity, a perceptual stance that begins in trying to presume

nothing, or more accurately, in trying to rid oneself of any presumption one already has. The problem with postmodern relativism, at least as Foucault embodies it here, is not that it is subjectively excitable. Rather, it is all too objective; it recognizes the roots of its objectivity in aesthetics and thus accepts (or imposes) a status of artwork on the knowledge and politics it analyzes.

(Loesberg 162)

The aesthetic is, however, meta-ideological: “Nietzsche has taken the aesthetics of Kant, Hegel, and even Schopenhauer despite himself and made of it not a particular position from which to look at objects and concepts differently (because indifferently), but the only perspective that recognizes perspective as a limit. One cannot argue that the perspective is self-contradictory since it claims not to be seeing truth but only appearance” (140). The wise folly I have been tracing in British realist novels, like Foucault’s account of the human sciences, is a form of aestheticism. In novels the conventions of fiction itself provide the necessary ethic of irresponsibility. Fiction also provides the boundaries that contain this ethic, while the hypothetical, winking analogies of realism point beyond those boundaries, towards the outside that, with respect to the fiction, constitutes the reader’s reality. Realist novels invite readers to enter an aesthetic play in which children and adults alike make believe, not necessarily suspending our disbelief, but temporarily bracketing ontology.

Eventually children grow up and readers finish books: significantly, Kipling offers a return to ontology in the final chapter of *Kim*. In a crisis of identity, which is directly presaged by his attempt to grapple with Hurree’s paradoxical identity, and an ensuing resolve to “get into the world again,” Kim first feels, “though he could not put it into words, that his soul was out of gear with its surroundings—a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery” (Kipling, *Kim* 234). Sick

of the Great Game, Kim has retreated into a sightless pre-aesthetic vision that cannot even apprehend “the size and proportion” let alone the “use of things” (234). Gradually, however, Kim “felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true—solidly planted upon the feet—perfectly comprehensible—clay of his clay, neither more nor less” (234). Many have read this restoration of the purposes of things as Kim’s recommitment to imperial service, to the mechanism of the Game, but in noting that roads are for walking on and people for talking to Kim is not operating at the Game’s level of abstract and absolute knowledge. Kim returns to a world of purposes, but not necessarily of categorical truth: “As the ‘gear’ imagery makes clear,” Kinkead-Weekes writes, “this is commitment not to the Game, with which we are no longer concerned, but, at a far more fundamental level, to the Wheel of earthly and human life, against the view which holds that all these things are illusion, and one must keep oneself apart from them” (231). James Thrall, likewise, emphasizes that Kim’s reconnection is to the physical world, not specifically to a colonial program (61).

Many critics have wondered what happens next. We follow Kim’s enlightenment, then learn of the lama’s, and we know that the two are different. But we do not see Kim’s final response to the lama. Sara Suleri considers the “chilling conclusion” of the novel to represent the lama’s domination of Kim, his *chela*, but this argument is plausible only if we take the ultimate sentence, “He crossed his hands on his lap and smiled, as a man may who has won salvation for himself and his beloved,” seriously and without irony (Suleri 130; Kipling, *Kim* 240). The humour of the last few pages, and indeed of the lama’s relationship to Kim in general, works

against such a reading. Whether the lama has attained enlightenment or merely had a swim, Kim certainly seems to think he is as mad as ever, which means that the lama's claim is only what it was all along—a claim of affection, not of mastery. In contrast with Suleri, Zohreh T. Sullivan reads this final irony as an unsettling subversion of the lama's "powers of contemplation, meditation, vision, repose, and nonaction" (449). Does Kim, then, turn from the lama to rejoin the Game? Or does he become something else altogether? We do not know.¹⁰ It is also significant that Kim's crisis is narrated in words that are explicitly the narrator's own: Kim "could not put [his feeling] into words" (Kipling, *Kim* 234). The overt mediation again relegates Kim's actual experience to the inaccessible interiority where it so often resides. The ending of *Kim* is not a victory for the imperial forms of knowledge or the lama's ideology of ignorance, but neither is it a synthesis of conflicting epistemologies. Kim slips through the cracks of the dialogue between them, and we do not know the outcome of his education.

The novel, therefore, is neither the narrative of a boy's maturation into a man nor of a street urchin's metamorphosis into a sahib: the epistemologies of absolute knowledge and absolute ignorance both eliminate, in antithetical ways, the possibility of escaping childhood and subalterity. Sitting under a banyan tree and a wooden cart, Kim affirms the physicality of "Mother Earth" and enjoys the "good clean dust," "fe[eling] it between his toes, pat[ting] it with his palms," and falling asleep (235). The scene, which echoes but does not necessarily emulate Gautama Buddha's meditation under the *bodhi* tree, is a symbolic rebirth that suggests but does not promise a way out of the bind: "The many-rooted tree above him, and even the dead man-handled wood beside, knew what he sought, as he himself did not know" (235). After his sleep of "a hundred years," Kim issues "from those deep wells" with a reconfigured epistemology, saying

¹⁰ For an account of and another challenge to the common assumption that Kim turns back to the empire the end of the novel, see Clara Claiborne Park.

to the lama: “I know nothing, but that I have not seen thee in a monkey’s age” (238). Kim’s new-found ignorance is not the lama’s. While the lama narrates his own enlightenment, Kim shows merely a puckish interest in peripheral details, especially what the Sahiba said about the lama’s dousing, which we can only imagine would have been keenly phrased. John Lockwood Kipling’s clay relief illustration, entitled “The End of the Search,” emphasizes the difference between the lama’s “end” and Kim’s.¹¹ In the middle ground the lama sits beneath a tree in the posture of a Buddha while the wheel of a cart behind him forms a halo around his head. Kim reclines in the foreground languidly, but seems alert nonetheless, his attention captured not by the lama but by something unseen beyond the right frame of the image. Mahbub Ali, his head just visible over a mound in the background, also looks off to the right. Kim’s novel of education, beginning in its final pages, looks forward to what we will never see: Kim has found both the Great Game and the lama’s rejection of the Wheel of Things unsatisfactory, and it remains for him to become an adult on his own terms if he can. If we are expecting closure, we might find the ending itself unsatisfactory, but it allows Kipling to write a novel about a child without finally claiming to know him, a novel that offers us, more than particular knowledge about Kim, boys, India or anything else, an encounter with the challenges of knowing.

Coda

This chapter can be understood as an encounter with certain challenges of reading, which resemble the challenges of knowing in *Kim*. Although my title may indicate that a direct analysis of the relationship between aesthetics and ideology is forthcoming, the theory of aesthetics that I have been applying suggests that this relationship is worked out in the act of reading, and can be

¹¹ The illustration is reproduced in the illustrated Macmillan editions of *Kim*, p. 404, in the 1901 edition. I am grateful to an anonymous reader for *SEL*, who pointed me towards this wonderful illustration and whose helpful response to my article is reflected in this chapter.

worked out different ways. The empirical question of how readers have read belongs to the growing field of the history of reading, and the current project points towards a future one that will seek possible answers to this question in the archives. The argument of this chapter, however, consists primarily in a reading, a total aesthetic apprehension of the design of a work organized around those moments of sustained apprehension that are usually called “close readings,” and the value of my theoretical approach to aesthetics and ideology stands or falls with the value of the reading that accompanies it. This is not to say that the reading seeks to be true: as an aesthetic apprehension, the mode of this reading is hypothetical, and it proceeds as if *Kim* were designed to do what I say it does, just as this dissertation proceeds as if the realist novel were designed to create space for the dialogical position of the reader through the devices of wise folly. The claims of this dissertation have the form of ontological statements, but are not: really I am arguing for the advantages of seeing things in certain ways, and those advantages do not lie in one particular understanding of *Kim* or the realist novel that results but in the kinds of understanding that are facilitated by these ways of seeing. This brief coda, then, will be methodological—a theoretical discussion of practice, inseparable from the foregoing examples of that practice.

As I remarked at the beginning of this chapter, the dialogue of reading involves a power differential in which the reader or the work may be dominant. Which voice is dominant depends on the method of reading. This priority of reading in a relationship in which the reader may nevertheless yield up power reflects the role of the reader’s “active responsive understanding” in dialogue, without which the dialogue does not exist (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 71). Dialogic theory, therefore, shares with Loesberg’s aesthetic theory a recognition both of the construction that the listener, perceiver, or reader performs, as well as something other to the reader that is

being read, and that may act on the reader. Certain kinds of devotional reading treat the work as monologic and inviolable, consisting of what Bakhtin calls “authoritative discourse”:

“authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it. It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it” (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 343). Similar but less extreme are the practices of identification usually associated with the consumption of popular entertainment, including fiction—the search for the “relatable,” for images of oneself, images into which one may project oneself, or images which one may assume as part of one’s identity. The straw man of this kind of reading is the Quixote. Alluding to that ingenious hidalgo, Said roots Orientalism in a “*textual* attitude,” that is, a Quixotic assumption “that the swarming, unpredictable, and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say” (*Orientalism* 93). This opposition between the tidy text and messy humanity leads Said to recommend direct experience as an alternative to textuality: “It seems a common human failing to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human” (93). Considered through a post-structuralist suspicion of the *hors-texte*, this solution is unconvincing: the problem with Quixote is not that he needs to experience more, but that he absorbs discourses and other forms from the romances he reads without applying these forms flexibly and selectively to help him read what he experiences. As an example of the reader who asserts discursive dominance, one might oppose to Quixote a caricature of Freud, a practitioner of what Eve Sedgwick calls “paranoid reading.” As Sedgwick notes, the paranoid reader must establish priority, in a temporal sense, over the text: “The unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia generates, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows

both backward and forward: because there must be no bad surprises, and because learning of the possibility of a bad surprise would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news always already be known” (130). The danger of this priority is tautological reading, from which nothing can be learned that is not (always) already known by virtue of the systems through which objects are read (132).

The difference between these poles could be framed as greater and lesser degrees of closeness to the text or fidelity to it: as Sedgwick writes, “of all forms of love, paranoia is the most ascetic, *the love that demands least from its object*” (132, author’s italics). Yet Quixotic reading, though it is often also emotionally attached, does not necessarily demand more from its object than paranoid reading does. If Freud is the figure for the paranoid reader, Quixote is the figure for the paranoiac-as-reader—the difference is the location of the windmills. John Farrell remarks:

The self-heroizing wit with which Freud admits his likeness with the paranoid schizophrenic Judge Schreber, for instance, was part of a rhetorical game he learned from Swift and Cervantes. Freud saw himself in Oedipus’s crime, in Narcissus’ mirror, in the antics of Quixote, and in Schreber’s delusions, and he made a grandiose point of pride out of his ability to accept these distorted reflections as his own. In his usage, *paranoia* becomes a comic self-reflection that one cannot repudiate. (5-6)

The language of pathological reading I have borrowed from Sedgwick places us back in Plato’s pharmacy, attempting to tell apart two seemingly opposite but obstinately similar reflections in order to diagnose them and propose an alternative (Derrida 169-71). In fact, the problem of these two kinds of reading resembles the ethical problem that we have seen George Eliot wrestle with:

one can be an egoist by failing to imagine what the world might look like from someone else's centre of self, or by imagining it too confidently. Submitting to the otherness of a text may also be a way of dominating it.

If the reader is an egoist, an ethnologist, a paranoiac, a fool, then aesthetics is a wise folly, a means to mitigate this folly by casting judgments in the hypothetical mode while paradoxically enabling a kind of fidelity to the text, which is construed as a work with a design. This fidelity is that of formalism, but while traditional formalisms have couched their aims in the language of devotional reading, logic, or closeness, labelling deviations of reading as heresies or fallacies, aestheticism springs from irresponsibility. This irresponsibility enables one to set aside evidence of authorial intention in order to describe the appearance of a design, but also to use whatever evidence is available in service of that description; to bracket concerns of historical synchronicity in order to make broader diachronic connections between texts, or to devote most of one's attention to tracing synchronic metonymic relations, as Elaine Freedgood does when reading "fugitive meanings" in *The Ideas in Things*. The possible means are diverse, but the end I am identifying is above all a rich understanding of the appearances of design in literary works and in categories of them, an understanding of literary form.

In describing the form of realist novels, I have been seeing faces in clouds; but, as Loesberg argues, this activity need not be mere subjectivism or impressionism (97). The clouds, I take it, are there to be seen, and describing the faces is a way of seeing, and talking about, the appearance of the clouds. The faces I have described in this particular class of cloud, the British realist novel, have been the faces of wise fools: in arguing that gnomic speech in Meredith is a device of his ambivalent narrative authority, that the ethics of sympathy in Eliot makes a case for its constitutive other, that literary education and quotation in Scott and Meredith are kinds of

dialogic horse-jumping that reflect the process of reading novels, and that a profound distrust of knowledge informs the practices of knowing in Kipling, I have construed designing intelligences that are playing the fool, hypothetically exploring the interpenetration of wisdom and folly, broadly conceived, in all human endeavour. I hope that these arguments constitute convincing descriptions, that the dialogue between myself and my readers, as we apprehend these novels together, has contained moments of agreement and recognition (though not *too* many). I also hope that, by demonstrating how the British realist novel invites disagreement and engages the reader's disagreement—by demonstrating that one may apply formalist and resistant modes of reading, at once and without contradiction, to the British realist novel—I have suggested the persistent value of this form for readers at the present time. I have attempted to ask the most of my objects of study, and to show how these objects are capable of rising to the challenge. Like Harry Shaw, I believe that “realist novels *ask* to be read in quite complex and interactive ways,” and that we may “engage realist novels in a dialogue concerning the issues that most concern us” (*Narrating Reality* 36, 37, author's emphasis). These novels do not tell us what wisdom is, because they do not know, but if we are prepared to imagine with them that we do not know either, they are prepared to inquire with us what wisdom might be.

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